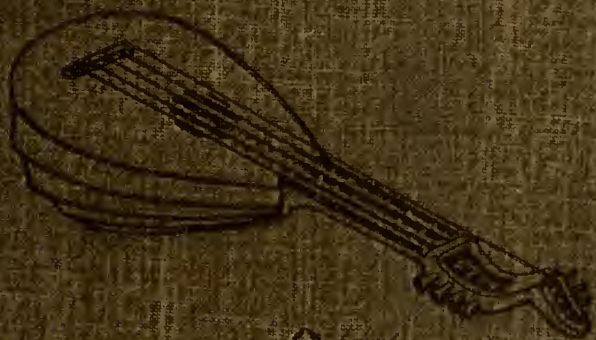
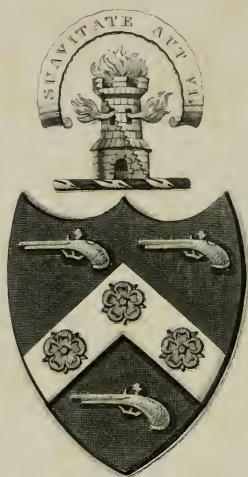


*A Daughter
of Music*





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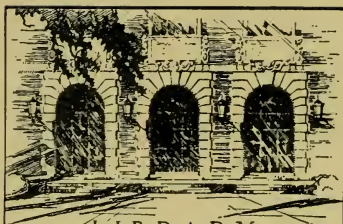
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A DAUGHTER OF MUSIC

BY
G. COLMORE

AUTHOR OF
'A CONSPIRACY OF SILENCE,' 'CONCERNING OLIVER KNOX,'
ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES
VOL. I.



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TO

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' . . . the daughters of music shall be brought low.'

ECCLESIASTES.

*' For whithersoever the soul of man turns itself,
unless towards Thee, it is riveted upon sorrows, yea,
though it is riveted upon things beautiful.'*

CONFESSIONS OF ST. AUGUSTINE

A DAUGHTER OF MUSIC

BOOK I.

A FACE OF LEONARDO.

I would that you were all to me,
You that are just so much, no more.

R. BROWNING.

CHAPTER I.

In the commonest human face there lies more than Raphael will take away with him.—CARLYLE.

ON a lonely heath beside a wood stood the farmhouse of Heather Den. A road, deep-rutted and narrow, ran between the heath and the wood, and passed within fifty yards of the house ; then, dwindling into little more than a bridle-path, took a wandering way back to the highroad, which it had parted from three miles back. The house was square and low, with a flat slate roof, and thick, squat chimneys ; the walls were gray and bare ; no ivy or climbing rose softened their hard outline, or hung drooping about the narrow-paned windows ; no

shrub or waving tree broke the long straight line of the front : all was cold and hard and blank. Only a single fir-tree stood on a little mound to westward, like a sign-post pointing to the sky, and the sky and the heaven beyond it seemed nearer, more easily to be reached in that lonely place, than the earth of cities and the world of men. On two sides of the house the heath stretched almost from its walls miles and miles away ; but at the back, and widening out into the wood, lay the fields and grass-land of the farm. The ground dipped where the road ran, and the dip spread out into a hollow behind the house : in the hollow lay the farmyard and buildings, and beyond, some flat, wide meadows. But soon the ground tired of the level and rose upwards again ; and the ploughing horses, creeping up the brown side of the hill on autumn mornings, seemed as though they meant to follow the direction of the

fir-tree signpost and mount into the sky, till, pausing when they reached the summit-line, the hand of man turned them to the earth again, and they came back into the valley, only all day to climb the height anew, and to climb it each time in vain.

On a June day, when the air was still and the hot sun shone unshaded on the earth, a man walked over the heath towards Heather Den. It was between five and six o'clock in the afternoon, but on the treeless heath the heat was fierce still, and the man looked worn with exhaustion as he plodded on. He had a thin, tired face ; he was tall ; his figure was spare, almost gaunt ; his hands were large, nervous, and strong.

‘To call it an easy walk,’ he said out loud ; ‘it’s a pilgrimage, a—a——’

He broke off, not finding any word to express the measure of his annoyance ; he spoke peevishly, as though he were irritated rather than angry.

‘A devil of a way.’

A voice that seemed to come from nowhere finished the stranger’s sentence. He started, and stopped, and looked about him. All around the heath stretched bare and flat, destitute of concealing bush or tree. The nervous irritation on his face gave way to a puzzled look ; he knit his brows, and said in a voice that was half defiant, yet held a touch of fear :

‘Who spoke?’

‘I did.’

From out the thick heather, a yard or two away, a head was raised, and two long dark eyes met the stranger’s searching gaze. The eyes were set in a dark, pale face, clean-shaven, with thick, dark hair about the brow, and full, firm lips that met each other close.

‘I spoke. Where are you going to?’

There was a certain insolence in the calm voice that roused the other man’s resentment.

‘That is my own business, not yours,’ he answered.

‘You are going to old Wichelow’s. You are Anthony Dexter.’

‘How the devil——’

‘Do I know? I know most things about here. It is not difficult; there are very few to know. You have not much further to go; when you get to the top of that little mound yonder, you will see the Den.’

The head disappeared into the heather again. Anthony Dexter stood still a minute, undecided whether to attempt to continue the conversation; then he went on towards the mound that the other had spoken of.

It was not far away, nor steep. He soon reached the top, even with his lagging steps, and when he had reached it, he paused again, and shading his eyes with his hand, looked on ahead. Before him, about a mile away, lay the house he sought; only the upper part of it was visible, for the ground sank towards it, and hid the lower row of windows and the door; but the roof and the higher

story were clear in all their square unpicturesqueness, and the sun shone full on the bare gray walls, on the slates, and on the squat chimneys. As Anthony Dexter stood and looked at the house, his chief feeling was one of desire to reach it, so that he might be at his journey's end ; there was no room in his mind for conjecture as to what companionship or experience awaited him there ; there was no presentiment of all that was about to happen to him within those square stone walls and the lonely country about them. Worn out with excitement and hard work, he had come far away from his work to find rest, and he longed for the rest to begin. Behind him, the man lying in the heather, with his face turned up to the sunshine, and his dark eyes half closed, was thinking of the house, too, but with different thoughts and different feelings from those of Anthony Dexter.

The traveller did not pause long ; very

soon he went on again, faster now, the thought of the little distance still to be covered giving the energy to cover it more quickly, and in another twenty minutes he was close to the house. As he went down the slight slope that led to it, he was struck with the intense quiet of the place ; the door was shut, and the windows, and there was no sound of life either within or without. There was no garden ; only a little flagged space divided the house from the heath ; he stood on this space and looked about him. To the right was the mound with the one fir-tree rising thin and alone ; to the left the woods ; behind, the heath that he had crossed : and the fir-tree and the woods were silent, for no breeze moved the branches or rustled in the leaves ; and the heath was silent ; and the house, with its half-drawn blinds, and its door closed to the warm June air, seemed the most silent of all.

Anthony Dexter paused with his hand on

the knocker, almost afraid to disturb the silence ; then he knocked, tentatively, cautiously, making only a faint, uncertain sound. Faint as it was, it seemed loud and intrusive amidst the stillness that it broke so charily ; but though it penetrated the quiet of the woods and the heath, it woke no answering sound within the house, nor response of any kind. The man, hesitating, waited a minute, then knocked again, and, as there was still no answer, yet again. The door was still closed, and there was still no sound of footsteps or of movement ; and Anthony Dexter, his reverence for the silence swallowed up by his impatience, beat vehemently upon the unyielding wood. Then, suddenly, and quite close to him, a voice said :

‘What’s your business ?’

He started and looked above and about him. The door and the windows were still shut, and he still stood alone upon the flags. But presently, to the right of the

door, he became aware of a tiny opening, of the size of one brick only, covered with a grating. Behind the grating two eyes looked forth, suspicious and searching; and when at length he met their gaze with his own gaze, the voice repeated the words it had uttered before :

‘What’s your business?’

‘My business is to get into this confounded house,’ answered Anthony, half puzzled and half angry.

‘Ay! but what for?’ said the voice.

‘What for?’—anger was stronger than perplexity now—‘what for? when I’ve come all the way from London for no other reason than to get in, and to sleep there and to eat there for a month to come! By Jove! if you don’t open the door, I’ll find my way through the window.’

‘Are you the man that’s to be our lodger?’ asked the voice again.

‘Who else should I be, considering that

no human being seems to live in this place for miles round ?’

The eyes disappeared from the grating, and presently the door was opened a hand’s breadth. Anthony Dexter, thoroughly irritated now, gave it a kick to hasten its slow opening, but it yielded only a few inches, and a grating sound told him that it was still secured by a chain.

‘Where’s your luggage ?’ said the voice.

‘It’s coming—in some carrier’s cart or something. I don’t know where it is now, and I don’t care.’

‘And your name ?’ the voice went on.

‘Dexter, of course — Anthony Dexter. Are you going to let me in through the door or not ?’

A faint muttering was the only answer ; then slowly the door was closed while the chain was withdrawn, and in another minute Anthony Dexter entered Heather Den.

CHAPTER II.

And silence waited, as the curving wave
Waits ere it breaks in murmurs on the beach.

THE door of the house opened into a stone passage, and in the passage stood the owner of the eyes that had looked forth through the grating. He was an old man, about the middle height, very thin and very pale; his head was bald on the top, but silver-white hair hung in straggling locks some inches below the nape of his neck. His features were delicate and well cut; his eyes, of a bright blue, were restless and searching. They looked at Anthony with a penetrating gaze as he entered; they followed him as he strode a few paces along the passage.

‘Which way shall I go?’ asked Anthony, stopping short.

‘Kitchen to right, room to left,’ answered the old man.

Anthony turned through a doorway to the left, and found himself in a large square room. It was sparely furnished, yet had an air of order and comfort. The flagged floor was bare except for a strip of carpet before the two low windows, and a square rug before the open fireplace; the whitewashed walls were purely clean. On the mantelpiece stood half a dozen pieces of old blue china, and a shelf on the opposite wall held a dozen or so more. Otherwise the walls were bare, except where a bright red curtain broke the stretch of whiteness opposite the windows.

Anthony Dexter sat down on a high-backed settle that stood between the fireplace and the window.

‘Is Mr. Wichelow in?’ he asked.

‘Yes,’ answered the old man.

‘I should like to speak to him.’

‘Speak on; I am Mr. Wichelow.’

‘You? I beg your pardon——’

‘Why?’

‘Because—well, because I thought you were somebody else.’

‘As you have never seen me before, I am not offended at your not knowing me.’

There was a pause. The old man stood by the fireplace, waiting, his searching eyes still fixed on the new-comer, his under lip a little pushed forward.

Anthony Dexter felt embarrassed and uncomfortable; but presently the sense of injury began to revive in him, and he said:

‘You give me a strange reception. Is it your habit to treat your lodgers with such scant courtesy?’

‘We’ve never had a lodger before.’

‘Why do you take one now?’

‘For the sake of the money.’

‘Ah—yes. Well, I suppose it was a

foolish question. In the advertisement you say, "A comfortable home." Do you think——'

'It's for you to think. This is the room we live in ; you can judge if it's comfortable.'

Anthony Dexter looked slowly about him. The stiff, clean room had something of quaintness in its air that pleased him ; outside, the evening light lay soft upon the heath ; and everywhere the quiet reigned complete. It all seemed very restful, very far away from the life that he had left ; and he said softly, and rather as though speaking to himself than the old man waiting near :

'I think I will stay.'

'The terms,' said the old man, 'are that you pay a week in advance.'

Anthony half started ; the peaceful stillness of the place had made him dreamy, and the prose of the old man's words broke in abruptly upon the vague sentiment of his mood.

‘The terms? Oh yes,’ he said; ‘very well.’

He took two sovereigns from his pocket, and laid them down on the table.

‘Guineas,’ said the old man; ‘and washing extra.’

Anthony added two shillings to the gold.

‘I suppose I need not pay for the washing in advance,’ he said, with a half-smile. ‘I can hardly tell what it may be—to a shirt or two.’

‘And you board and live with the family,’ the old man went on. ‘It was all said plainly in the letter. I suppose you kept it—the statement of terms?’

‘I’m not sure.’ Anthony Dexter felt first in one pocket and then in another. ‘Yes, here it is.’

He drew forth a letter as he spoke; it was written in a round, rather formal hand, and it was signed ‘R. Wichelow.’

‘Here is your letter,’ he said, handing it to the old man.

‘It’s not mine ; my grand-daughter wrote it. And I don’t want it ; I know what’s in it ; it’s for your own satisfaction, so that there may be no disputing.’

‘I am not likely to dispute ; I only want to be quiet, and to be left alone. And now, if you don’t mind, I should like to see my room.’

The old man turned and led the way out into the passage again, and up an uncarpeted wooden staircase, to a broad landing that ran the whole length of the house, and was lighted by a square window at either end. He moved slowly along the landing towards the further window, opened a door near it, and said :

‘That’s your room.’

It was a large room, very scantily furnished, and the boards were bare except for a strip of matting by the bed ; but everything was as scrupulously neat and clean as in the room below. There was only one ornament: on

the uncovered deal table that stood beneath the small square of mirror nailed to the wall was a glass of flowers.

‘It’s a good room,’ said the old man.

‘Yes,’ said Anthony rather doubtfully, looking at the uncarpeted floor.

‘Supper at eight,’ said old Wichelow; then left the room, closing the door behind him.

Anthony Dexter stood still and looked about him. Just the bed and one chair, a small, rather rickety washhand-stand, and the deal table; that was all the furniture in the room; and the blank wall spaces and bare boards looked somewhat comfortless.

‘Well, it’s a change,’ he said to himself at last, ‘a thorough change; and, after all, that’s what I want.’

There were two windows in the room; one looked towards the woods, the other on to the farmyard and fields at the back of the house. Anthony could see the haymakers

at work in a long sloping meadow that ran up the side of the hill: they worked on steadily in the subdued evening light, and presently he sat down on the wide ledge of the window and idly watched them. By-and-by he turned his head from the scene outside inwards towards the room, and, as his eyes wandered round it, they fell again upon the glass of flowers. He began to wonder who had put it there. Not his host, certainly; perhaps that R. Wichelow who had written the letter; perhaps a servant, though servants didn't as a rule—well, it didn't matter; but he took the letter out of his pocket and read again the short, stiff sentences in the careful, upright hand, and the signature—‘R. Wichelow.’ There were not many women's names beginning with R: Rachel, Rose, Rebecca——

‘I hate people who only put their initials,’ said Anthony Dexter, with a touch of impatience.

He got up and crossed the room, and as he did so there was a knock at his door, and the door opened to let in old Wichelow's head.

'The carrier has brought your luggage,' he said. 'If you give him sixpence, he'll bring it up.'

'Let him bring it up, and I'll give him sixpence.'

In ten minutes Anthony's portmanteau and Gladstone bag were in his room, and he was left alone again. He unpacked slowly, stowing away his clothes in two little cupboards in the wall, one on either side of the fireplace; and then, feeling very tired, he lay down on the bed to rest. The soft evening light grew paler and paler in the room; a faint scent from the hayfield stole in through the open window; and in the great silence was that slight sense of movement, felt only in most perfect stillness, which is caused by the beating of one's own heart, but which

seems like the rhythmic throb of the pulse of time.

To Anthony Dexter the absence of all sound was rest and healing ; the quiet was to him as the sweetest music ; as he lay there in the evening peace, his tired nerves were soothed and strengthened, and he said to himself that he had done well to come to this far-away, lonely place. The glass of flowers was growing dim in its shadowed corner, and dim and uncertain in outline was the crumpled sheet of paper that lay near it, the letter that was signed ' R. Wichelow.'

Anthony Dexter's gaze fell direct upon the deal table, and he looked dreamily at the flowers and the little square of white. He was not consciously thinking of them ; yet they were in his consciousness, vaguely, as was a half-formed picture of the girl who had touched them both. He pictured her as beautiful, not caring much whether his illusion were destroyed or not, but because it

pleased him, lying there in the half-light, to think that somewhere from out the peaceful loneliness a gracious, ideal face would come and look at him, and that from out the silence a voice, full and soft, would speak.

A real voice spoke and roused him from his dreaming ; but it was a voice feeble in tone and somewhat harsh in quality. Old Wichelow, knocking at the door, called to him to come to supper. He rose from the bed, and presently went downstairs to the room he had first entered, and which, as he found afterwards, was called always simply 'the room.' The table was covered with a white cloth, and there were knives and forks laid for three ; but the old man was alone when he entered, and he felt instinctively that a strong, thick-built woman who came in just after him, bearing a covered dish, was not R. Wichelow.

Old Boniface Wichelow seated himself at the table.

‘Supper is ready,’ he said.

Anthony still stood with his hand on the back of his chair.

‘Your grand-daughter,’ he said—‘is she not——’

‘She has not come in.’

‘You do not wish to wait?’

‘I never wait.’ The old man helped himself to food, and began to eat. ‘Supper comes,’ he said, ‘and supper goes. Those that don’t come at the right time go without.’

Anthony Dexter sat down and began to eat his supper. The fare was plentiful for two, but it would have been rather scanty for three; and Anthony felt, as the meat and bread and scones disappeared, as if he were taking the absent girl’s share. He tried once or twice to open a conversation; but Boniface Wichelow evidently did not care for conversation, and the short space of time that the meal lasted passed chiefly in silence.

When it was over, Anthony went across to the window and looked out. The pale blue sky was quite cloudless ; a beauty of peace lay upon the heath ; the quiet loneliness of the outside world called to him. He waited a moment ; then went into the passage, and, taking his hat, strolled out on to the little flagged space before the house. In front the heath ; to the left the dark fir-tree, with a strip of pink and orange sky behind its lonely height ; to the right the road, and beyond it the woods.

Anthony Dexter lingered, looking about him for a moment or two after he had lighted a cigar ; then slowly he went towards the road, glanced up and down, crossed it, and sauntered into the woods.

CHAPTER III.

Then she spake : her speech was such
As not ears but heart did touch.

SIR PHILIP SIDNEY.

THE woods were silent with the silence that seemed to possess all the country-side, but across the silence came the full, sweet notes of a nightingale, beating tremulously through the still air. Anthony Dexter paused a few minutes to listen to the lonely song, then wandered on through the deepening shade of the trees, slowly, carelessly, not heeding the direction in which he went, delighting in the absence of those many sounds of rumbling wheels, barrel-organs, brass bands and human voices, which, preying on his strained nerves,

had at last become unbearable, and made flight from them a necessity.

On and on, still very slowly : even the gray of the evening light was rest ; and his weary body forgot its weariness as his spirit inhaled and rejoiced in the great quiet that lay over all. Great and unbroken, or it had seemed so till now. He could not tell when first the silence had ceased to be absolute, when first the sound that moved so gently towards him had struck upon his ear ; the stillness had been broken so softly that the break had been hardly perceptible : but the moment that brought him the consciousness of the break, brought him the knowledge that for some moments before that consciousness had been active, there had floated through the quiet the sound that he heard distinctly now, the sound of a sad melody, sung by a pure, full voice.

He paused and listened ; and the sound rose suddenly, swelled by other voices, harsher

and less true than the voice that had gone before ; then sank again, and there was a moment's silence before the single strain broke forth once more. Anthony Dexter moved on, led by the sound ; and the sound grew stronger as he moved ; and again came the burst of voices, raised in what the plaintive melody made a cry of longing or of prayer. Still forward, more quickly ; the sound was very near him now ; the singer must be—— Suddenly there was a break in the woods ; the thick brushwood and undergrowth that had hidden the onlook ceased ; and Anthony Dexter found himself on the borders of an open space, a clearing in the midst of the thick-growing, motionless trees. He stopped short, and looked, and listened. In the open space was gathered a company of men and women, in number about twenty : some were young and upright, but most were bowed and bent with age, or hard work, or the two together : and the men, with their smock-frocks or shirts

open at the neck, and the women with their wide-brimmed hats or large cotton bonnets, all held rakes or pitchforks as they stood. Some of the faces were dull and heavy ; some were only very weary ; some were both : here and there a young face showed that the joy of living was not yet quenched in finding the means to live. They were grouped, some leaning on their rakes or pitchforks as they stood, round a central figure ; in their midst was a young girl, tall, full-busted, strong, dressed in a scanty, clinging gown of pale lilac cotton, and holding in one hand a sun-bonnet of the same material and colour as her dress. Her face was turned towards Anthony ; slightly raised, the eyes looking upwards to the sky, it was lighted by a glow of exultation as she sang in the pure voice that he had heard afar off. The words that she sang were a kind of doggerel verse :

‘ Sorrow and toil through all the weary day,
Sorrow and toil, and neither let nor stay,
Sorrow and toil till life shall pass away ;’

and the voices of the men and women standing round, joined in, quavering and uncertain, harsh, strong, true and false, with the girl's voice, as it rose and thrilled in the refrain :

‘ But oh for the rest beyond !’

The air of the song was quaint, and wild, and plaintive ; it was written in the major key, yet had a minor sadness in it ; or perhaps the minor note was in the worn faces of the men and women, as they stood with eyes fixed on the singer in their midst, or joined in the cry of longing for a rest which could only lie beyond the daily life they knew. The girl sang on :

‘ Sorrow and toil, and sin and passion rife,
Satan at hand to vex us in the strife,
No hope of rest through all this struggling life ;’

and again the chorus swelled :

‘ But oh for the rest beyond !’

The singer paused a moment, and glanced at the group around her. ‘ Sing with me, dear friends,’ she said, then raised her voice

and started the next verse. And now, here and there, a voice joined in with the girl's voice, feeble and uncertain, jarring on the pureness of her notes, dying away again, and leaving her to sing a few bars alone, till in the last line many voices joined, with the upward and downward drag from note to note common to the untaught in music :

‘Sorrow and toil and many bitter tears,
Quick-dying hopes and ever-living fears,
Hearts tired with beating all the weary years ;
But oh for the rest beyond!’

The wail of the chorus, full, longing, with a ring in it that came from the half-conscious bitterness in the hearts of the singers, died away. The girl turned her eyes from the sky to the people around her.

‘It is late,’ she said ; ‘the light will soon be gone. Go home and rest ; the Lord will keep you through the night, and give you strength for to-morrow’s work.’

She stood, with her arms folded, the sun-

bonnet dangling from one finger, while the people, slowly, and in various directions, passed out of the open space. The women gave little bobbing curtseys, and the men touched their hats before they went, and the girl returned their salutations gravely, with a slow bend of the head.

Anthony Dexter drew back into the undergrowth : some of the company passed along the path by which he had come, and he did not wish to be seen ; but when the figures had disappeared amongst the trees, he stepped forward again, so that he could see into the cleared space. The girl still stood there alone ; her arms were still folded, her face was dim in the lessening light ; but her eyes seemed to look, calm and steadfast, in amongst the trees, to the spot where Anthony waited and watched her. She moved a few paces forward, and Anthony moved too, rustling the leaves purposely as he pushed his way on to the path. She stopped a moment when

she heard the rustling, and then came on again, saying in the full, low voice that had wished the people good-night :

‘Is that you, Micah? Are you too tired to get home?’

‘It is not Micah,’ said Anthony Dexter. ‘It is I, a stranger.’

He stepped out into the cleared space. He was close to her.

‘Tell me,’ he said, ‘who you are.’

The exaltation was still alight in her face, and there was a thrill of exaltation in her voice as she answered him.

‘I am the servant of the Lord,’ she said.

The man could only look at her. Her face was very beautiful in the gray light ; and inscrutable. There was subtlety behind the exaltation ; it lay in the curves of the mouth, and in the eyes, drooping slightly at the corners ; and there was passionate feeling. The face interested him, moved him, affected him strangely.

‘Tell me,’ he said eagerly, and with a trembling dread of disappointment in the answer, ‘are you R. Wichelow?’

‘I am Rhoda Wichelow,’ she answered.

‘Rhoda! Of course,’ he said—‘of course that is the name.’

‘Why of course?’

The exaltation was gone from her face now: the lips curled slightly as she spoke.

‘Because you could have no other name. Rhoda! It suits you absolutely. There was never a Rhoda in the world but you.’

‘I am glad the name pleases you,’ she said coldly. ‘And now I must go home.’

‘I am your lodger,’ said Anthony Dexter, ‘and I must go home too. May I walk with you?’

‘If you will.’

The girl strode on, and he followed her. The path was narrow, and he could not

have walked beside her unless she had chosen to tread on the extreme edge of it, and she did not choose; she walked in the middle, and she did not turn nor speak. On through the woods they went; the dry twigs cracked beneath their feet; otherwise the silence was unbroken. Curiosity and a strong desire to hear her speak again made Anthony venture upon a question at last.

‘Those people,’ he said, ‘that were with you just now, who are they? Labourers—village people, I suppose?’

‘They work for my grandfather,’ the girl answered. ‘Just now it is the haymaking, and they are haymakers for the time.’

‘And you—do you sing like that every night?’

‘When it is fine.’

‘It is very good of you.’

‘Good?’ The girl stopped suddenly and turned upon him. ‘Do you call that good? All day they work, from the early morning

to the dusk—and longer if there is work that must be done ; there is no room in their lives for anything but work, and work, and work. They have no time to think of their souls, or the life of souls ; they have no time to think of anything but just how to toil on and on from day to day. And if in the summer evenings, when the light lingers, they will come sometimes and think for a little while of the brightness beyond the dull, daily life ; and if they let the longing and the weariness of their hearts come out in the songs we sing, is it goodness to be with them for half an hour, and to give them what help I can ? You call it good. It is not good ; it is human, that is all.'

She turned and walked on again, and Anthony Dexter followed her in silence, not knowing what to say. She did not speak till they had passed out of the woods ; then, before crossing the road, she stopped again and turned her face to him once more.

‘It will not be very comfortable for you at Heather Den,’ she said.

‘I think it will—quite comfortable enough.’

‘You do not know, but I know. I wrote to you when you answered the advertisement, and I said what my grandfather told me to say; but I also tried to make the terms seem as disagreeable as I could, so that you should not come from London all this way.’

‘Why did you not want me to come?’

‘I knew you would not stay.’

‘I think I shall stay.’

‘You will not have the sort of food you are used to.’ The girl’s voice became almost defiant, and her face flushed slightly. ‘You will hardly have enough. And then,’ she went on hurriedly, before Anthony could speak, ‘it is all so bare and poor.’

‘But it is beautifully clean,’ said Anthony, and felt when he had said it that it was a ridiculous thing to say.

Rhoda Wichelow gave a little scornful laugh.

‘Oh yes, it is clean,’ she said.

Then she walked on across the road and into the house, and Anthony Dexter followed her.

CHAPTER IV.

There is nothing makes a man suspect much more than to know little.—LORD BACON.

IT was dark in the passage, and almost dark in the room. Pale gleams of light came through the small-paned windows, and showed dimly the shrunken form of old Boniface Wichelow crouching on the settle.

‘ Good-evening, grandfather,’ said Rhoda Wichelow.

‘ Why are you so late ?’ was all the old man answered.

‘ The work went on till late this evening. You had said that the hay must all be turned in the hill meadow before it stopped.’

‘But you could have come in in time for supper—and the lodger here.’

‘You know I never stop work till the people stop.’

‘Always thwarting and self-willed,’ the old man muttered—‘always her own way.’ Then louder he said, ‘Supper is over long ago. You know my rule?’

‘Yes. Sally will make me some gruel ; it is all I want.’

Boniface Wichelow got down from the settle and came towards the girl.

‘Not with milk,’ he said ; ‘by Jehovah, you shall not have milk ! If you don’t come and eat at the right time, you shall not have extra food cooked at double the cost.’

The girl made no reply, but walked slowly out of the room, and Anthony Dexter stood hesitating and uncomfortable, not knowing what to do. But in a minute Rhoda returned, bearing a lamp.

‘It is hardly dark yet,’ said old Wichelow ; ‘we do not want a light just now.’

‘Other people do not care for such a long twilight as you do, grandfather. Mr.’—Rhoda turned to Anthony—‘Mr. Dexter would like a light.’

She looked at him as if for an answer.

‘Yes,’ he said, more for the sake of agreeing with her, of appearing to take her part, than because he really cared much whether the room were light or dark.

Rhoda put the lamp on the table, and once more left the room. When she had gone, the old man came close to Anthony.

‘What are you going to do?’ he asked.

‘I don’t know — except to sit down.’ Anthony drew a chair to the table as he spoke, and seated himself.

‘And talk,’ said Boniface Wichelow. ‘It is a very good time to talk—the evening.’ He came and put his face close to Anthony’s face. ‘You do not want a light, eh?’ he said—‘not to talk by?’

Before Anthony could answer he had turned out the lamp. In the first minutes

the darkness seemed complete, but gradually the last wan gleams of daylight made themselves felt, showing dimly the table and chairs and the large black mass of the settle. There was no sign of old Wichelow, and all was so silent that Anthony began to think he must have left the room.

‘Are you there, Mr. Wichelow?’ he said at last.

‘Yes.’

The answer, in the old man’s feeble, rather high voice, came from the settle, and Anthony perceived that he must have taken up his former position there. Nothing was added to the ‘Yes,’ and the minutes went by, darker and darker, but always in silence.

Anthony Dexter began to feel ill at ease ; the stillness that had been so sweet a little while since became oppressive now ; it seemed to possess a positive quality that had something deathlike in it ; and the fancy grew upon him that the shrewd, searching

gaze of the crouching figure on the settle was strong enough to penetrate the darkness, and that the eyes that had looked at him through the grating were fixed upon and saw him now. He told himself that the fancy was a ridiculous one, and tried to shake it off; yet it would not go; it strengthened into a conviction and dominated him. He was tired, out of health, lacking in nervous force; and no doubt the condition of his body tended to the development of the mental state in which he found himself; yet afterwards, when his body grew strong again and his nervous energy revived, there was never an occasion, of all the many occasions on which it happened, that he was alone with old Boniface Wichelow, when he was not conscious of something of the same sensation he felt that evening; and the sensation was always stronger in proportion as the light was less. It is hardly strange that it should have been so. The influence of a strong spirit makes itself felt

even amidst the constant distractions of everyday life ; and when these distractions are in suspense, when darkness blinds the eye and silence starves the ear, it is natural, rather than unnatural, that the soul of a man should dominate his surroundings, and that a strong spirit should impress itself upon a spirit less strong.

The windows faded gradually from the wall ; the night rose up behind them and made itself one with the darkness within the room ; and still the silence endured, and still Anthony Dexter sat motionless, and the feeling grew stronger that through the darkness the eyes of old Boniface Wichelow pierced with certain sight, and held him in bondage with a force he could not combat. He did not know what length of time had passed, when, while still there was no sound within the room, outside the house came a sound which, as it broke the heavy silence that pressed upon him with paralyzing weight,

brought with it a sense, hardly so much of relief as of salvation.

A whistle, low and clear, rose softly through the stillness of the summer night : it was repeated once and again, and then a voice, a man's voice, spoke. Anthony Dexter could not hear the words it said ; but he heard the answer, and he knew the voice that answered, the same voice, low but full, that had spoken in the woods.

‘I could not have come to you before,’ it said.

In the strange state of his consciousness, it seemed to Anthony that it spoke to him, even while he knew it was not so ; and it seemed to him that this was the voice he had dreamed of in his waking dream in the room upstairs, when the twilight had shown him dimly the glass of flowers plucked by an unknown hand. ‘I could not come to you before,’ it said ; but it had come forth at last out of the silence, as he had dreamed it would, and he was content.

Outside the voices went on talking in low tones. Anthony heard no more words that were said, but while the voices spoke he was freed from the spell which the unseen presence of Boniface Wichelow had exercised upon him in the silence. After a time they ceased, and he was left alone again in the still darkness ; and again the subtile influence that took its rise from the silent figure on the settle began to lay hold on him. But not for long : after a little space of the black, dead silence the door of the room was opened, and someone entered. Anthony could not see who it was, but he felt that it was Rhoda Wichelow, and in a moment she spoke.

‘ You are in the dark,’ she said ; and as no answer came, ‘ Grandfather, why did you put out the lamp ?’ she went on.

As she spoke, she moved forward through the darkness to the table by which Anthony sat ; her dress brushed him as she passed.

She struck a match, and once more there was light in the room, and Anthony Dexter awoke from his nightmare. Rhoda repeated her question.

‘Why did you put out the lamp, grandfather?’

The old man, crouching on the settle, screwed up his eyes as though the light hurt them.

‘We did not want a light to talk by,’ he said.

He rose from the settle, crossed the room, and passed out of the door.

‘Did he talk?’ asked Rhoda Wichelow.

‘No.’

The girl stood with her two hands on the table, her head thrown slightly back, looking over the lamp, over Anthony’s head, as he sat, to something on the opposite wall—or beyond the wall: the light came in an upward stream, showing distinctly the full, round throat, the firm chin, and the delicate

nostrils, and leaving the upper part of the face in shadow. As Anthony watched her face, and the expression of it, he was reminded of a picture that hung in his room at home, a drawing of a woman's head and bust. It was copied from a painting by Leonardo da Vinci, and it had always fascinated and puzzled him by the mystery of the woman's face. The spirit of the Renaissance looked forth from it: beauty, the pride of life, passion, subtility, daring; all the splendour and all the evil of an aroused humanity, triumphant in its own strength and its own glory. And in this half-lighted face he seemed to see something of the same inscrutability that fascinated him in the picture face, and something of the same strong capabilities. He did not ask himself whether the capabilities were for good or for evil: he did not reflect that strength for the one means strength for the other; and that it is not in capabilities but in the control or

fostering of them that sin or holiness gathers the force of victory : he only felt instinctively that the depths and heights of a human soul showed dimly in the upturned face before him, and that an undeveloped nature awaited development.

It was only a minute that Rhoda Wichelow stood looking at something that was not in the room : presently there were slow steps in the stone passage, and old Boniface returned. He came close to his granddaughter, and laid his hand on her arm with a clenching grip.

‘Where is Sally?’ he said.

‘She has gone to bed.’

‘The milk has gone from the pan in the larder. If she has given it to you, I——’

‘She did not give it to me ; I took it.’

The old man’s face darkened ; the dormant evil in it awoke ; he raised his hand. Anthony Dexter got up from his seat, but Rhoda waved him back ; with her disen-

gaged hand she held her grandfather's hand, and lowered it to his side again.

'I took no more than I needed,' she said. 'I work for you all day long; I work as hard or harder than the people you hire—and God knows they work hard enough; I earn and more than earn the food I eat, and I must have what my strength needs. If it failed me, or if I were to leave you, you know that I should be a loss to you.'

Boniface Wichelow's expression changed as she spoke: there was a dim fear in his eyes and a certain deprecation in his voice as he answered her.

'But why not come in to supper?' he said. 'It costs so much less—all to eat together.'

'I have told you why I did not come in to supper,' Rhoda said.

The old man made no reply, but loosened his grip on her arm and went across the room to the settle. But when he reached it he turned and came back to her.

‘You can do as you like,’ he said; ‘it doesn’t matter about the milk, Rhody.’

The girl did not answer; she was looking away from him; and to attract her attention he put his hand upon her arm again. He touched it very gently, but Anthony could see that she winced.

‘Very well, grandfather,’ she said, and she spoke quite gently. ‘I hear.’

‘And you will not leave me, Rhody—not just yet?’

‘Not just yet,’ she answered.

The old man stood for a minute in silence, then: ‘It is late,’ he said—‘time for bed. You must be tired, Mr. Dexter.’

‘Yes, I am quite ready to go to bed.’

‘Then we will go up. Are you coming, Rhody?’

‘No.’

The girl moved from the table across to the red curtain on the wall. She stopped when she reached it.

‘Good-night,’ she said ; and then she disappeared behind the curtain, and there was the sound of a door that was opened and closed.

Anthony followed old Wichelow upstairs ; but as he went he longed to turn back, to enter the room, to pull aside the curtain, and to see what lay beyond it. Left alone in his own room, and sitting down on the one chair to think over the curious evening he had passed, he gradually became conscious of the sound of a voice speaking : dimly and uncertainly his ear caught the sound : as he listened, he became more and more convinced that it came up from the room below. He set himself to consider the position of his own room, and by-and-by the thought that had begun in a hope strengthened into a certainty ; he felt sure that it lay over the room behind the curtain, and that it was Rhoda Wichelow’s voice that came to him with such vague sound.

He opened the door and listened ; the house was quite quiet. He took off his boots, and went cautiously along the landing and down the staircase, and then, still more cautiously, groped his way along the passage and into the room.

Yes ; he had been right ; it was Rhoda's voice that he had heard ; it was her voice certainly that he heard now. He felt with his hand carefully along the wall till he reached the curtain ; then he stopped and listened. Her voice came out to him ; he could hear the words she said :

‘ O Lord, save Thy people.

‘ And bless Thine inheritance.

‘ O Lord, let Thy mercy be showed upon us.

‘ As we do put our trust in Thee.’

As he listened, a sudden sense of shame took hold upon him ; he felt that he had no right to steal down and play the spy upon this girl who thought herself alone, that the curiosity that had led him to do it was mean

and contemptible ; and he began to move back slowly along the wall. But in the same moment that he stirred the voice ceased, and in another instant he heard the uplifting of a latch and the rustle of the curtain.

With a few bold steps he strode away from the wall out into the room, thus leaving a free passage from the curtain to the door ; and with his heart beating so violently that he feared lest she should hear it beat, he waited for Rhoda Wichelow to pass. Her footsteps sounded distinctly on the bare stone floor ; she came on a few steps and then stopped, and Anthony could hear that she breathed quickly. He held his own breath, and waited, motionless, fearing every moment to hear her voice, scornful and accusing. But after a pause she moved on, and her footsteps died gradually away. Anthony waited a long time before he ventured to climb the stairs and find his way back to his own room.

CHAPTER V.

How sweet I roamed from field to field,
And tasted all the summer's pride,
Till I the Prince of Love beheld
Who in the sunny beams did glide.

WILLIAM BLAKE.

ANTHONY DEXTER passed a restless night. The upturned face of Rhoda Wichelow, with the upper part flooded by the lamplight and the lower part in shadow, and the face of her grandfather, with its shrewd, searching eyes, were with him in his dreams and during the frequent intervals of wakefulness that broke the night. He was weary and unrefreshed when the dawn, breaking far off across the heath, gathered strength enough to enter and fill the room, and reveal to him its bare

unfamiliarity. Only the glass of flowers, shadowy in its corner, had something familiar and friendly in its air, and it must have been placed there—he felt sure of it now—by Rhoda Wichelow. He rose and moved the table close to his bed ; then, lying down again, fell at last, in the growing daylight, into a sleep that brought him forgetfulness and rest.

The sunlight was full on the roofs of the farm buildings and on the sloping fields beyond, when he again awoke, aroused by a persistent knocking at the door.

‘Yes,’ he called—‘yes. What is it?’

‘The breakfast and the master’s ready,’ said a voice, ‘and he says you’d best be quick if you want any.’

About half an hour later Anthony entered the room. Old Wichelow had finished his breakfast and gone, and Rhoda was coming towards the door as he went in.

‘Are you going?’ he asked, disappointment strong in his face and voice.

‘Yes.’ She stopped for a minute. ‘Your breakfast is cold, but I cannot help it.’

She had on the large calico bonnet she had worn on the evening before ; her sleeves were turned back above the elbows. On the right arm, just above the wrist, was a bruise, or, rather, there were several bruises, four distinct blue marks. Anthony saw the marks.

‘Your arm,’ he said ; ‘is it——’

He stopped as he raised his eyes to the girl’s face ; there was something in it that told him to stop. She put her hand quickly over the bruised place, as though to hide it.

‘Never mind my arm,’ she said ; and she went past him into the passage, and through the outer door, out of the house.

Anthony turned to the breakfast-table. Cold porridge, cold, weak tea, scones, bread-and-butter ; that was all the breakfast. He understood why Rhoda had said to him, ‘You will not stay.’ Just for a minute he began to think she had spoken the truth ; he

was fastidious about his eating, and the cold food was not tempting. Then the charm of the girl's face grew strong again ; the story in it, past or to come—and he felt that the chief part of it was still to come—was a story that he longed to know, and he made up his mind that he would stay and read it. He took a little of the weak tea, and ate some bread-and-butter, and then went out on to the heath. The summer morning was still soft with youth ; there was a balmy freshness in the air, and everywhere a sense of dreamy contentment, a consciousness of the long, sweet day to follow. The silence was broken by the clucking of hens in the farmyard, by the songs of birds, by the distant murmur of voices in the hayfield ; but none of these sounds jarred upon Anthony's weary ears ; rather did they seem gentle and soothing to him as they faintly stirred the stillness. He lay down in the heather not far from the house, and, looking up at the cloudless sky

above, abandoned himself to the state of dreamy thought which had shadowed him since his arrival at Heather Den.

He lay there till the sun's increasing strength became greater than was comfortable, and then, without consciously determining whither he would go, he wandered into the wood, and took the path he had trod the evening before. The trees were still motionless, but the gray enchantment that had hung from the quiet branches was gone now; instead was a deep, dark shade, with gleams of scattered sunlight; and many songs of many birds replaced the nightingale's single notes. He wandered on, screened from the blazing sun, enjoying the beauty and the peace around him with lazy, sensuous enjoyment, till the influence of the place entered into and possessed him, as in Andrew Marvell's poem,

'Annihilating all that's made
To a green thought in a green shade.'

The path led direct to the cleared space where Rhoda Wichelow had sung to the people ; almost, as he drew near to it, he expected to hear the sound of her singing. And yet the strain, with its burden of sadness, was not in keeping with the strong, full light of the noonday ; it belonged rather to the waning gray of dusk : as he went on, he felt with each step that the scene of the evening before was impossible now ; a different spirit seemed to reign in and sway the woods.

A different spirit, a different scene, a different face ; truly it was so. As Anthony paused, as he had paused before, and looked through thick-leaved branches into the space beyond, he saw that it was not quite empty : on a felled trunk a man sat, whittling a stick. Anthony knew the face, with its long eyes and its crown of black hair ; it was the face that had been raised from out the heather as he had passed across the heath on his way to Heather Den. He had seen it only

cursorily, indistinctly, then ; he could see it plainly now. He stopped and observed it. A clean-shaven face, there was nothing to hide the shape and lines of the mouth, or the contour of the chin ; he could mark the lips, the upper one thin, the lower one rather full, and the firm pressure of the two together ; he could mark the strength of the jaw, the determination of the lines about the nostrils, and the boldness of the brow. Anthony Dexter was not a physiognomist, and he did not attempt to draw the character of the man from his features ; he felt rather than inferred the power of the face before him, and in the power was something that repelled him. As he looked, the man glanced up.

‘ Anyone coming ? ’ he said.

He still whittled away at the stick, but his dark eyes looked round the circle of trees, and then rested near the spot where Anthony stood. It seemed to Anthony that they suspected his presence there, and instinctively

he drew back further into the wood, and then cautiously found his way into the path again, and went back towards Heather Den. For some reason, which he did not attempt to explain to himself, which he could not even define, he shrank from another interview with the owner of the dark, strange face, and his return through the woods had in it something of the nature of flight.

All the day he hardly saw Rhoda Wichelow. She came in at dinner-time, and sat down at table with him and old Boniface ; but the meal was quickly over, she spoke very little during its course, and as soon as it was ended she returned to the hayfield. During the afternoon Anthony Dexter ventured to follow her there : he took a book with him, and at first sat down at some distance from where she was working, and watched her while he pretended to read. She was much taller than any of the women, taller than many of the bent, stunted men : the pose of

her figure, as she moved from one position to another, was beautiful in its easy grace : he could not see her face, shaded by the wide frill of her bonnet. For some time he watched her, at first with quick, continual glances from the page he did not read, afterwards with the book lying closed by his side ; till at last the strong interest with which she inspired him, an interest composed of many feelings, of which puzzled curiosity was perhaps the strongest, caused him to rise from his lounging position in the shade of a tree, and to approach her as she stood raking hay into a little heap. She looked up for a moment as he drew near, but went on with her work without appearing to notice him.

‘ Do you never speak ? ’ he asked at last, piqued by her indifferent silence.

‘ Never—or very seldom, when I am at work. ’

He waited a minute, observing the face

that would not reveal to him what lay behind it. Then he said :

‘ May I work too ?’

‘ If you like.’ She raised her eyes and looked at him with a swift glance. ‘ No,’ she added ; ‘ you are not strong enough.’

There was a touch of contempt in her voice. Anthony Dexter winced under it.

‘ You admire strength ?’ he said.

‘ Oh yes.’

‘ And you despise weakness ?’

‘ No, I pity it.’

There was a moment’s silence.

‘ I think,’ said Anthony, ‘ that I used the right word, after all ; despise is nearer the truth.’

‘ No. All these people ’—she gave a little wave of her hand—‘ all these people are weak, and I pity them.’

‘ The people—yes ; but me ?’

‘ Oh, you ? I am not concerned with you ; you do not belong to my life.’

‘ I do,’ Anthony said quickly, ‘ for a time,

at any rate ; so long as I live in your house, and am your lodger.'

She half smiled, and there was a shadow of laughter in her eyes.

'Ah! that's just it; you lodge there, but you do not live in it.'

'But I may; it might happen that I became a part of your life.' He spoke almost defiantly. 'How do you know?'

'I do not know, of course.'

She slightly raised her shoulders; the movement seemed to imply that the possibility he had spoken of was indifferent to her. He turned away: he had meant to amuse himself by the indulgence of his curiosity, and she had made him angry. But after taking a few steps he came back to her again.

'Do you know,' he said, with a longing to raise himself in her eyes—'do you know that it is hard work that has made me ill and weak?'

She paused in her task, and looked at him : there was a quickened interest in her face.

‘What kind of work?’ she said.

‘Do you care to know?’

‘Yes.’

‘Then I will tell you,’ he answered, ‘but not now. I will tell you some day, when you, too, will let me know something about yourself.’

‘Ah!’ she said. Her eyes rested on him for a quarter of a minute ; there was a little wonder in them, a little inquiry, and the unfathomable inward look of the pictured eyes in his room in London ; then she turned away from him, saying :

‘You must not talk to me any more, please. I have my work to do.’

She moved away to a group of haymakers at a little distance, and Anthony Dexter went slowly out of the field, feeling himself dismissed.

CHAPTER VI.

The region of music which is the hidden workshop of the soul.—GEORGE MACDONALD.

It was nearly supper-time, and there was no sign either of Rhoda or of Boniface Wichelow. Anthony Dexter sat in the room, looking listlessly out of the window. The silence was deepening about the house as the dusk drew on ; he began to feel very lonely. Presently came a distant clattering of knives and plates : it drew nearer, and Sally entered with a loaded tray.

‘Where is Mr. Wichelow?’ asked Anthony.

‘Gone to Breybridge. Him allus goes of a Saturday.’

‘Is it far?’

‘More’n six mile.’

‘He drives, I suppose?’

Anthony spoke rather for the sake of continuing the conversation than to gain information; the house seemed very lonely.

‘Drive—him drive? Lor’ bless you no! Walks.’

‘All that way? I shouldn’t have thought he could have done it.’

‘Oh yes; him can do it—with time.’

‘He’ll be back in time for supper, I suppose?’

‘Not afore ten o’clock. Then it’ll be a drop of water gruel with a smell of whisky in it—’t isn’t more’n enough to smell it by, and nobody don’t know where he keeps it.’

‘And what does he go all that way for, pray?’

The woman grinned and chuckled.

‘A half-ounce of baccy. Him smokes it of a Sunday.’

‘But surely’ — Anthony began to be interested—‘surely he could get tobacco nearer than Breybridge? There must be a shop of some kind—a village.’

Again the woman grinned.

‘It’s a halfpenny cheaper at Breybridge nor what it is anywhere else,’ she said. She had finished laying the table now, and went over to the door; there she paused. ‘Oh!’ she said, with concentrated vehemence, ‘him’s close.’

She passed through the doorway, but Anthony called her back.

‘Tell me,’ he said, ‘will Miss Wichelow come in to supper?’

‘Likely,’ said the woman, ‘being Saturday.’

And then again she left the room.

It was nearly eight o’clock when Rhoda passed the window and entered the house. She ran quickly upstairs, and was down in time to help Sally to bring in the supper.

‘Your grandfather is out,’ said Anthony.

‘Yes, he is always out at supper-time on Saturdays.’

‘And you—are you always in on Saturdays?’

‘Yes; we do not work overtime to-day.’

‘In most places people stop work early on Saturdays.’

‘Not here.’

‘I almost wonder,’ said Anthony suddenly, after a moment’s thought—‘I almost wonder that anybody works for your grandfather.’

‘There are so few people to work for,’ Rhoda answered, ‘and so many who want to work.’

There was a pause, then Anthony said :

‘Did you sing to-night?’

‘Yes.’ She looked at him across the table. ‘You did not come.’

‘Did you expect me?’

‘No.’ She was still looking at him. ‘And yet,’ she said, ‘I thought perhaps you would.’

‘I was afraid to come. I knew’—he paused—‘I knew I was in disgrace.’

Rhoda made no reply, but bent her eyes again. Presently she said :

‘Was that why you didn’t come?’

‘Of course.’

‘You would have come but for that?’

‘Of course,’ he repeated.

‘Then you liked it?’

‘What?’

‘The song—the singing.’

She spoke so gravely that he answered her gravely too, almost in spite of himself :

‘Yes.’

Her eyes met his with the same inscrutable look they had worn in the wood.

‘Ah!’ she said softly, ‘I thought so.’

‘I don’t mean,’ said Anthony, ‘that I liked to listen to those people you’—he smiled—‘you pity.’

‘No, no,’ she said half impatiently, ‘of course not. But me—you liked to hear me?’

‘Yes.’

She gave a little sigh as of contentment, but said nothing ; and presently, the meal being over, she rose and began to clear the table. Anthony stood by the window and watched her as she moved to and fro. Was she very vain ? he thought, and could not answer the question ; he could answer none of the questions that he asked himself about her ; and his ignorance made her the more interesting.

When the table was cleared, Rhoda brought in the lamp, and having put it down :

‘Have you any books ?’ she said—‘anything to amuse yourself with ?’

‘I have some books, but they do not amuse me.’

Rhoda had moved away from the table as she spoke, towards the red curtain on the wall ; she had reached it now, and she turned and said :

‘ I am going in here.’

She stood with her back to the curtain ; her right hand, raised above her head, grasped one of its folds ; her head was slightly thrown back, so that her eyes had a downward glance as they looked at Anthony across the room. The red of the curtain made a brilliant background for the beautiful face and figure ; the subtle charm of her expression seemed to grow as she waited ; Anthony Dexter looked at her with a quicker beating of the heart.

She stood for a moment in silence ; then she said : ‘ Will you come ?’

Without a word he rose, and came quickly towards her. She waved him back.

‘ Bring the lamp,’ she said.

He turned and did her bidding ; and then, while she held the curtain aside, he passed through an open doorway in the wall into an inner room. Rhoda dropped the curtain, followed him, and closed the door.

The room was a small one ; the floor was

uncarpeted, the walls unpapered, as in the other rooms in the house, but there was no impression of the bareness that characterized those other rooms. The walls were a pale yellow; on the stone flags before the fireplace was a large thick rug of many colours, that had been brilliant once, but were faded into softness now; on the table that stood in the corner was a cloth of the same vivid red that hid the entrance from the outer room. Over the mantelpiece hung a bookcase on which were a few volumes: a Bible, a Church Service, Jeremy Taylor's 'Holy Living,' Law's 'Serious Call,' and an odd volume of Carlyle's 'French Revolution'; opposite the wall was a piano, open, and on the music slide a book of revival hymns.

Anthony put the lamp down on the table, and looked about him. "

'This is your room?' he said—'yours only?'

'Yes.'

Her eyes were on the piano. He followed her glance.

‘Do you play on that?’

‘Not often, only to learn the tunes by.’

He went over to the instrument and examined it.

‘It is old,’ he said.

‘It belonged to my mother. She brought it here long ago.’

‘She did not teach you to play it?’

‘Yes, but I do not care to play it; it creaks.’

Anthony Dexter sat down and struck a few chords on the yellow notes.

‘It has been good once,’ he said. ‘It creaks now a little, as you say, but it was good once.’

She answered him with a question :

‘You are a musician?’

‘Yes.’

‘I thought so,’ she said. There was a kind of triumph in her eyes.

‘Why?’

‘I dreamed it.’ She paused a moment, her triumphant eyes still fixed upon him. ‘Did you see,’ she said, ‘the glass of flowers on the table in your room?’

‘Yes; was it you——’

‘I put them there, not for you, the lodger, but for the musician of my dream.’

‘Am I he?’

She did not answer him, but moved a few paces away: the light was behind her now, and he could not see the look on her face. He played a few bars of a melody and stopped.

‘Play on,’ she said.

Anthony rose from his seat.

‘May I have the lamp nearer to me?’ he asked.

‘As you like.’

He took the lamp and placed it near the piano. He did not want more light, but he wanted the light so placed that it should fall upon her face.

‘You do not care to sit down?’ he said.

‘No; I like to stand.’

She went over to the mantelpiece and leaned against it: she waited, looking towards him, while he opened the top of the instrument and tried the pedals. Then he sat down and began to play.

He played one of Bach’s preludes; the movement was *adagio*; it was full of majesty, of pure, severe beauty. The girl stood motionless while he played. Looking back at her over his shoulder, he could see that on her face was the same look of exaltation that it had worn when she sang in the woods: her hands were clasped, her eyes had a faint wonder in them.

He paused, and she did not move: he ran through a few modulations, and glided into a nocturne of Chopin’s in a minor key. The changing time, the restless striving, the modern spirit of the music,

touched something in Rhoda Wichelow's spirit that breathed a change upon her face. A vague excitement mingled with the exaltation of her look, her nostrils dilated, her curving lips parted, the wonder in her eyes became an eager expectation. He played on, and the clasped hands were loosened ; one was half raised, and one foot stepped half a pace before its fellow ; but she did not actually move forward ; she stood, while the complaining music filled the room, still with her head a little thrown back, as if in the act to advance, but yet was motionless.

The music ceased, and Anthony Dexter looked back at her again. She still stood in the attitude that promised immediate movement, and still she did not move ; her face, with its curving, quivering lips and waiting eyes, held all the mystery of Leonardo's face. When he paused, she gave a little sigh, but waited motionless, as though listening for

sounds that were yet to come. Still watching her, he put his hands upon the keys again, and played Wagner.

As the strange, new harmonies struck upon her ear, the girl's face changed again; the exaltation died quite away; instead came a look more human, more passionate, more complex. Her head, instead of being thrown back, was bent now—towards the player; the figure poised ready for movement moved at last. She took a step forward. Anthony played on, played the music, pagan, bewildering, maddening, that the world heard first when Wagner began to write: and the strange beauty of it, the evil and the power that is in it, the sad sweep that pines through the whirl of it, the strains of sweet, lost hope that wail in it, stirred the girl's being, aroused, mastered, overwhelmed it, and led her trembling and helpless towards the man who revealed it to her.

The instrument he played on was old,

inadequate, creaking, as Rhoda had said ; only a great musician could have made it produce the sounds he brought forth from it that night ; only a great power in the player could have availed to show anything of the power of the music.

He played, and the girl came nearer to him ; the music swelled and triumphed through the room, and she came nearer yet. He looked back at her, and saw the momentous face, with the dawn of new feeling in it ; and the spirit of the music was in Anthony, too ; and he played on, and she came nearer still.

She stood close behind him now ; her quick breath brushed him as it came ; her hand almost touched his shoulder ; her face bent over him. A moment she stood so, bending, almost suppliant, drawn to him, or the music in him, by some power that was stronger than her will : then suddenly she stepped back, and rose up to the fulness of

her height, and stretched her right arm out, straight and firm.

‘Stop!’ she said.

And Anthony Dexter, obeying instinctively the command in her voice and attitude, did as he was bid, stopped in the crash of a chord, and let his hands slip from the keys ; and the music ceased suddenly, with jagged, broken notes ; and the silence of the lonely heath asserted its strength again, and entered and filled the room. The glow of active emotion was gone from Rhoda’s face ; she was very white, and she trembled. After a minute her lips moved, and she spoke in a whisper. •

‘Is that music?’

‘Yes.’

Anthony spoke in a whisper, too, and then again there was silence. It was broken by a sound from outside, a sharp tapping on the window-pane ; the sash was thrown up quickly, and a face showed itself, looking

forward into the light out of the darkness behind. Anthony knew the face ; it had greeted him on the heath ; he had observed it in the wood. Rhoda looked round at it, and said :

‘ It’s Paul.’

CHAPTER VII.

God Cupid's shaft, like Destiny,
Doth either good or ill decree.

FULKE GREVILLE.

‘SHALL I come in this way?’ said the voice at the window.

‘No,’ Rhoda answered; ‘go round to the front.’

The face remained stationary for half a minute, looking into the room; then it drew back into the darkness and disappeared. Rhoda turned to Anthony.

‘Will you take the lamp back?’

He obeyed her without speaking. She shut down the window, waited alone for a little space, and then followed him.

There was a knocking at the outer door. Rhoda went into the passage, and opened it. Anthony could hear the talking of low voices, and then she and the man whose face he already knew came back to the room together.

‘This is Paul Garnet,’ said Rhoda.

She stood by the new-comer as she spoke ; she looked very fair, much fairer than she really was, in contrast with his dark face. They were two strange faces : his, inscrutable with a conscious, deliberate inscrutability, as though it said : I hide the soul behind me ; hers, subtile, mysterious with possibilities, as though the soul looked through and said : I know not what I am, nor what I may be ; I have yet to awake.

‘Mr. Dexter and I have met before,’ said Paul Garnet.

His address and manner of speech were those of a gentleman ; yet there was still a trace, a very faint trace, of the covert in-

solence with which he had spoken on the heath.

Anthony bowed without speaking.

‘I startled Mr. Dexter,’ Paul went on.

‘Undoubtedly,’ Anthony answered, ‘for a moment. I did not expect the heather to have a voice.’

‘I apologize. Another time I will be less abrupt.’

‘Another time I shall be better prepared.’

Paul Garnet turned to Rhoda.

‘Will you come out?’

‘If you like.’

The girl spoke somewhat coldly.

‘Mr. Dexter will excuse us,’ said Paul.

Anthony bowed again.

‘But do not go,’ he said. ‘I myself am going outside for awhile, so I shall not disturb you here.’

He left the room without waiting for an answer, and passed through the passage, and

into the still, warm night outside, with the star-flecked sky above, and before him the dark stretch of the heath.

When he had gone, Paul Garnet turned to Rhoda and kissed her ; then he put his hands upon her shoulders, and looked down into her face. His own face softened as he did so, and a light came into his eyes.

‘ Is it well, dear heart ? ’ he said.

She answered him :

‘ Surely, now you are come.’

She was still pale, and there was trouble in her eyes. Paul saw the trouble, but he would not notice it. He looked down at her, but for awhile he did not speak.

‘ Rhoda,’ he said presently, ‘ why did you take your lodger into that room ? ’

‘ Because——’

She hesitated.

‘ You never let me go in,’ he said.

‘ I did not take him in—as a man.’

She stopped again.

‘Oh, I am not jealous.’ Paul laughed scornfully. ‘Only I wondered why you did it.’

‘I don’t know,’ Rhoda said, ‘that you would understand if I were to tell you.’

‘Indeed?’ There was an inflection of sarcasm in Paul Garnet’s voice. He paused, and then added, ‘Suppose you try me and see?’

Her eyes were on his. She did not withdraw them, but she waited a little before she answered.

‘I don’t think I will,’ she said.

‘No? Well, I cannot, or, at any rate, I will not, influence you now. When we are always together, Rhoda, your spirit will be open to mine, and we shall have but one mind.’

The girl did not shrink from the piercing gaze he fixed upon her; her eyes met his unflinchingly, yet with a certain absent look in them. She answered half dreamily :

‘ I wonder !’

Outside, beneath the clear sky, Anthony Dexter strode forward across the heath. He walked quickly, driven on by the excitement of the last half-hour, the fever of which was still upon him. The spell of the music—and music was the great factor in his existence ; his enemy, inasmuch as the strong passion of it in his spirit preyed upon and wore his flesh ; his friend, inasmuch as the glory and beauty of it made up for him the chief joy of living—held him yet. The madness of those last harmonies rioted through his brain and leaped in his pulses ; and side by side with the echoing sounds went the vision of a mysterious face, with new consciousness breaking through its mystery, and a pathos of startled emotion in its eyes. He did not separate the sight from the sound ; the two were indivisible ; he could not think of one apart from the other.

Suddenly through the silence came a little

obstinately penetrating sound, a short, dry cough, repeated at quick intervals. Anthony stopped, and in the star-lessened darkness saw a black object, thin and small, at no great distance away from him, and slowly drawing nearer. He felt, with something of the same feeling that had held him in the room the evening before, that it was old Boniface Wichelow, and he stood still and waited for him to approach.

‘My lodger?’ said old Wichelow when within a few paces.

‘You are clever to recognise me in the dark.’

‘My eyes are poor—so poor that I do not trust them much ; but I felt it must be you.’

There was a pause ; old Wichelow showed no intention of moving on.

‘You have been to Breybridge?’ said Anthony.

‘Yes.’

‘You got what you wanted?’

‘Of course.’

There was another little silence ; then Boniface Wichelow said :

‘Are you coming back with me ?’

‘I think not.’

‘You had better.’

‘I do not wish to go back yet.’

‘I have something to say to you.’

‘No, I—I cannot come now.’ The idea of walking back in company with the old man was peculiarly distasteful to Anthony. ‘No, I must go on,’ he said, and he broke away, almost at a run, across the heath.

Old Wichelow turned quietly and went on alone.

Anthony Dexter walked forward for nearly half an hour longer ; then, as the excitement died out of him, he began to feel that he was very tired, and he turned his face homewards. His fatigue grew into exhaustion as he plodded his way back ; by the time he had come to his journey’s end he was faint with

weariness. When he reached Heather Den the house was dark ; the front-door was firmly secured, and his repeated knockings evoked no sign of life within. At last, angry and exhausted, he found his way round to the back of the house, and there, instead of the blank dark mass of the front, a glow of light gave some promise of aid. The light came from one of the lower windows ; he knew directly that it burned in Rhoda Wichelow's room. He drew near the window ; it was lightly curtained with some thin, muslin-like material ; through it he could see a dim figure that kneeled upon the floor ; listening, he could hear faintly the sound of a voice that rose and fell. He waited, thinking she would presently rise ; but she did not rise, she kneeled on, her body bending now and again almost to the ground, and her voice now dying away, now rising almost to a cry ; and at last very gently he tapped upon the panes. She did not hear at first, and he repeated the

sound more loudly and several times before her attention was aroused. When she heard him she rose at once, came towards the window, and drew the curtain aside. She stood for a minute, her figure outlined against the light behind ; she raised her hand and made a gesture, pointing over her shoulder ; then she drew back again, and Anthony could see that she disappeared through the door of the room.

He went round to the front-door again, and, reaching it, heard sounds of the drawing back of bolts and the lifting of a bar ; then the door was opened and Rhoda stood in the passage before him, a lighted candle on the stone floor beside her.

‘ Did I startle you ? ’ he said.

‘ No ; I expected you. I knew you were not in.’

‘ I am very sorry——’ he began.

‘ What for ? ’

‘ To have given you all this trouble.’

‘It is not much trouble.’

Anthony drew the bolts again and replaced the bar across the door. Rhoda held out the candle towards him.

‘Would you like to take this with you?’ she said.

‘You are not coming upstairs?’

‘No.’

‘Then——’

‘I have a light,’ she interrupted. ‘Good-night.’

‘Good-night.’

‘Stay!’ she said suddenly.

He turned, and she stood looking at him.

‘And Paul Garnet?’ she said.

‘Well?’ Anthony answered.

‘What of him?’

She was still looking at him.

‘Do you mean, what do I think of him?’

‘Yes.’

‘I do not like him.’

‘He is to be my husband,’ she said slowly.

Anthony did not answer her ; he stood looking at her face, on which the flickering candle cast strange lights and shadows, till she turned away from him into the darkness of the room and left him alone.

CHAPTER VIII.

Alone walking,
In thought pleynyng,
And sore syghyng,
Al desolate.

CHAUCER.

THE next day was Sunday, and the quiet of Heather Den seemed to be intensified. After the early breakfast Rhoda disappeared, and Anthony did not see her till nearly ten o'clock, when, as he sat in the room, he caught a glimpse of her going past the window. He rose up quickly and followed her along the rutted road that ran between the heath and the wood. He soon overtook her. She looked very prim in a narrow, straight gown of gray and a close-fitting bonnet.

‘Are you going to church?’ he asked.

‘No ; to chapel.’

‘You like chapel best?’

‘No, sometimes I go to church ; but many of my people go to the chapel.’

‘May I come?’ Anthony said.

‘As you like.’

‘What do you do all the afternoon?’ he went on. ‘Shall I see you then?’

‘All the afternoon I shall be with Paul.’

Anthony Dexter stopped.

‘I think—I hardly think I will go to chapel,’ he said.

Rhoda said nothing ; she had stopped, too, but after a moment’s pause went on along the road. But when she had gone a few steps she stopped again, and turned towards him.

‘This evening I shall sing,’ she said, ‘in the woods.’

‘Am I to come?’

She waited a little.

‘It will be earlier to-night—about seven o’clock,’ was all she answered. Then she walked on again.

Anthony stood and looked along the road. His first impulse was to follow her ; but the face of Paul Garnet rose up before him, and he did not move.

‘No, I will not go,’ he thought ; ‘and I will not go this evening to the woods. She is interesting, and the music—it seemed almost like the key ; I should like to have seen how far it would reveal her. But there’—he shrugged his shoulders—‘I dare say there isn’t very much to reveal, after all, and she will marry like an ordinary woman, and be under the thumb of her husband.’

He turned and walked back towards the house. How quiet it all was ! too quiet, he began to think ; dull in its wide loneliness. He had only arrived two days ago, and he had begun already to tire of the solitude.

‘Farquhar was right,’ he thought. ‘I

shall never be able to stay out the month. A week—if I stay till the end of the week, that is about all I can manage.'

He wandered into the hayfield where he had talked with Rhoda the day before, and whiled away the morning idly ; smoking ; sometimes reading a few lines in the book he had kept in his hand when he had hurriedly left the house ; thinking, as he imagined, of many things ; in reality, only of Rhoda Wichelow. Her face would not leave him ; it floated in the wreaths of smoke that rose from his pipe ; it peeped forth from the printed page he tried to read ; it came and looked over his shoulder with just the same look it had worn when it had been drawn closer and closer to him by the music's power.

Immediately after the early dinner Rhoda left the house again. Anthony had strolled up to the little mound whereon stood the fir-tree, and leaning against the thin, straight trunk, he could see the girl take her way

across the heath. As she lost her individuality and became nothing more than a black object whose every movement made it smaller, he became aware of another moving thing amidst the heather, something that came in the opposite direction. He watched the two specks as they drew nearer and nearer to each other. At last they met, seemed to pause for a moment, then grew smaller and smaller as they moved on together further and further away.

Anthony stood for some minutes after they had disappeared, looking in a vague, unthinking way into the distance that held what he could no longer see. He was about to turn away, when, quite close to him, a voice spoke.

‘Do you like him?’ it said.

Anthony started and looked round. Close beside him, peering up with keen, malicious eyes into his face, stood old Boniface Wiche-low.

‘Whom do you mean?’ Anthony asked.

‘Him’—the old man pointed across the heath—‘Paul—Paul Garnet that was here last night.’

‘No,’ said Anthony shortly.

‘Nor do I. I do not like Paul Garnet,’ the old man went on after a pause. ‘He will have all that I love—my house and my lands. He is to marry Rhoda.’

‘Is that why you dislike him,’ asked Anthony—‘because he will succeed to your property?’

‘Surely. And he will take Rhoda away from me.’

Anthony turned to him quickly.

‘Are you fond of your grand-daughter?’

‘Ay.’ Old Wichelow began boring into the ground with his stick. ‘And she saves for me,’ he added.

‘Well, if she didn’t marry him she’d marry somebody else,’ said Anthony, ‘so it doesn’t much matter.’

‘Anybody but Paul.’

The words were said in a low tone, but with a concentrated vehemence that caused Anthony to turn again quickly to his companion.

‘Why do you consent to the marriage if you dislike it so much?’ he said.

The old man pressed his lips tightly together; he glanced up at Anthony out of the corners of his eyes; then, without speaking, he walked slowly away.

The afternoon wore on. Rhoda did not come in to tea, and Boniface was engaged in the smoking of his hardly-acquired tobacco, so Anthony had the meal alone. He hurried over it, anxious to escape from the eyes of old Wichelow, who sat watching him through a film of smoke; and as soon as he could, he went out on to the heath again.

The glare of the day was over; the sun was still hot, but no longer fierce; the shadows were long; over the bare heath

the light lay in a full, soft flood. Anthony Dexter sat down beneath the fir-tree, and looked across the wide, unbroken stretch before him. It seemed to him that the distance that had swallowed those two black specks held them still; that far off in the horizon, beyond the point where his sight could reach, Rhoda Wichelow waited, hidden from him, but never moving beyond the dim boundary-line where the sky touched the heath; that she stood there, bound by some spell of the man who had led her thither; that lost, motionless, enchanted, she lingered in the hazy thread of space between the dark earth and the light above, and had no power to come back to Heather Den till Paul Garnet should let her go.

His thoughts ran on dreamily. Could he break the spell? Suddenly his heart stirred, and the blood came leaping up, and his eyes were shining instead of dreamy. A sense of power came to him, a certainty that he could

break Paul Garnet's spell with a stronger force ; that he could charm the girl who had faded away from him into the filmy distance, back again from the man who held her there ; that with the power of the music that reigned in him, and could be aroused in her, he could draw her face from the face that watched it now, and make it confess the riddle in it to himself. He sat there, exulting, triumphant, possessed by his heated fancies, till presently the fantastic nature of his thoughts became clear to him, and he jumped up with a short laugh that had some bitterness in it.

He looked at his watch. It was six o'clock, just an hour before the time that Rhoda would sing in the woods. But he would not go ; those were mad fancies that had come to him ; she had not, could not have, anything to do with his life. He would go for a walk ; and he strolled on across the heath. He went forward for half

a mile or so, paused, and looked at his watch again. It was a quarter past six. He went on, more quickly now. The house of Heather Den was sinking behind the little swell of heath that sheltered it, when he stopped once more ; it was half-past six : and he strolled on yet further ; and it was nearly seven.

Anthony Dexter looked over towards the woods : the evening would be further advanced in amongst the trees, he knew, than out on the open ground : he seemed to feel the soft hush that lay beneath the close-leaved branches, differing from the clear stillness of the heath ; and he seemed to hear the hush stirred, sweetened, hardly broken, by the sound of full, plaintive notes, the voice of Rhoda Wichelow as she poured forth the sorrows that her heart had gathered in from the toil-worn people around her. He stood, looking still towards the woods ; and her face, raised to the evening

light, with the glow of exaltation on it, as he had seen it first, seemed to rise up out of the mass of foliage, and the lips bade him come to her. The great stillness of the evening was filled for him with the sound of her voice ; in all the stretching landscape he saw only her face. He lingered awhile, listening to the silent sound, looking at the unseen face ; then he walked on, towards the woods.

CHAPTER IX.

My thoughts are all a case of knives,
Wounding my heart.

GEORGE HERBERT.

A QUARTER of an hour's quick walking brought Anthony to the path leading to the open space. When he reached it, he went more slowly ; he began to feel that Rhoda was near him and to hesitate, and Paul Garnet's face drove away the face that had led him hitherto. He still moved on, but with lingering, doubtful steps, as the sober reality encroached upon his dreams ; till at last he paused, not in doubt now, but in trembling delight ; for through the gray twilight of the still, listening trees

came once more the voice he had longed to hear.

Hesitation was gone now ; he was in an enchanted world again ; and he moved forward rapidly, while the voice grew fuller and stronger, till at last he stood on the verge of the open space. He waited there while the rough, harsh voices joined with Rhoda's voice :

‘ Yes, we’ll gather at the river
That flows by the throne of God.’

It was a revival hymn they sang, and the upward and downward heave of the voices as they dragged out the swinging tune reminded Anthony of the heave and wash of waves breaking on a stony shore.

The smock-frocks were all clean this evening ; the shirt-sleeves were covered ; there were no rakes or pitchforks ; a prim, clean, Sunday air was on the group that stood round Rhoda Wichelow and listened to and joined in her singing.

Anthony still waited ; he had thought that when the hymn ceased he would go forward and show himself ; but when silence followed the singing, his old hesitation came back to him, and he did not move. But Rhoda turned to him as he stood half concealed amidst the trees :

‘ You have come ? ’ she said.

There was hardly inquiry so much as assertion in her voice.

‘ Yes,’ he answered, and came forward till he was clear of the foliage.

‘ Come here,’ she said, ‘ nearer.’

He obeyed her, his eyes on her face. As he advanced, the circle of men and women opened and let him pass through. There was no surprise on the people’s faces, hardly any interest ; the dull round of a working, unthinking existence breeds a stolidity that has in it but little capacity for wonder. The circle closed again : just within it Anthony stood and faced Rhoda. She glanced round the group.

‘What would you like to sing?’ she said.

Nobody answered at first : the people looked at one another : at last a voice said, ‘Burden.’ Rhoda folded her hands, and began to sing :

‘Oh come, sinners, come, ’tis mercy’s call,
Here at Jesus’ feet ;
Oh come, and, repenting, lay thy all
Down at Jesus’ feet.’

She turned to Anthony.

‘Sing,’ she said.

Then she threw back her head slightly, and standing thus with upraised face, in the attitude that he knew, led the chorus :

‘Oh, lay it down, lay it down,
Lay thy weary burden down ;
Oh, lay it down, lay it down,
Lay it down at Jesus’ feet.’

And Anthony Dexter did as he was bid, and sang, his voice joining with the cracked, nasal voices around him, his eyes fixed on the upturned face of Rhoda Wichelow. As he sang, the rhythmic run of the tune, and the sort of yearning that the melody threw into

the words, and the words gave back to the melody, stirred in him a curious emotion, not wholly genuine nor altogether fictitious, which increased with each repetition of the chorus, and which gathered finally some reflection of the exaltation that lighted Rhoda's face.

When the hymn was over, there was a little pause of silence ; then Rhoda said :

‘The time is getting on ; you will like perhaps to be going home ?’

But Anthony broke in upon her words.

‘Not yet,’ he said. ‘Sing one more song—the song you sang when I came here the other night.’

‘Which song was it ?’ the girl asked.

Anthony sang the air of the refrain ; and she bent her head, saying :

‘Yes, I know.’ Then, looking round at the circle of faces, ‘Will you stay for one more song ?’ she asked.

Several heads nodded, and some voices said ‘Yes’ and ‘Surely’ ; and the girl,

going back into her old position, broke into the quaint, plaintive melody that she had sung when Anthony had seen her first :

‘Sorrow and toil through all the weary day,
Sorrow and toil, and neither let nor stay,
Sorrow and toil till life shall pass away ;
But oh for the rest beyond !’

There was a great pathos in her voice as she sang ; it chastened the beauty of her upturned face ; it ran in a quiver of longing through the notes of the refrain :

‘But oh for the rest beyond !’

Anthony Dexter followed where she led ; the tide of her emotion bore him with it as it rose ; in the last verse his voice sang with hers, and his being thrilled as the two voices swelled and sank, alone and together.

The last notes of the refrain died away ; the people, in ones, and twos, and threes, disappeared amongst the trees ; Anthony and Rhoda were left alone in the cleared space. The air was no longer quite still ;

a little breeze wandered fitfully through the wood ; the leaves stirred gently with a faint rustling.

Anthony said at last :

‘ I came, you see.’

‘ Yes.’

Rhoda’s face was still upraised, the eyes looking skywards. Anthony stood by in silence, content to watch her. Presently she turned to him.

‘ Shall we go home?’

‘ Not yet.’

The man’s worn, delicate features showed something of the trouble within him. The girl looked at him questioningly, and as she looked the fervour died out of her face, and the impalpable secret charm of her ordinary expression stole back to it again. Then he spoke.

‘ Why do you marry Paul Garnet?’

The impenetrable look on her face grew stronger.

‘Why should you ask me?’ she answered.

‘You are right,’ he said; ‘it was impertinent in me to ask you.’

She made no answer, but, passing him by, entered the little path that led back to Heather Den, and walked in silence through the woods.

Anthony paused a moment or two in indecision, then he followed her. All through the woods the faint rustling of the leaves was like a voice of the twilight singing the day to rest; from time to time a bird called with a lonely note; far off, on the borders of the dim grayness that floated between the trees, was a glow of golden light. The hush, and the movement of the leaves, the gold and the gray together, the beauty and the mystery of eventide, all seemed to Anthony to be inspired by some strange dream spirit, that swayed himself as well as the woods, that breathed forth ecstasy as well as longing, that found its embodiment

in the girl moving on with measured, silent steps before him. He followed her, hardly caring, after the first little while, that she did not speak ; content only to walk on and on so long as she moved before him.

But on the borders of the wood, where the trees stood less close together and the sunset light was full, she paused and turned and spoke to him.

‘ You asked me why I am going to marry Paul,’ she said, ‘ and I would not tell you, because, as I said yesterday, you do not belong to my life, and what I do and do not do is for me, and not for you, to judge of. But now I will tell you all you wish to know. Question me, and I will answer.’

She leaned up against a little thin tree ; she put her hands behind her, clasping the trunk at her back ; her eyes looked at him with almost a mocking look.

‘ I have asked my question,’ he said.

‘You should know the answer.’

‘The answer, the right answer, should be—
—for love.’

She smiled almost imperceptibly.

‘That is the right answer,’ she said.

‘You love him?’

‘Of course.’

‘I do not believe it. You do not know
what love is.’

She looked at him with unfathomable
eyes.

‘What is it?’ she said.

‘What is it? Do you mean——’

Anthony took a step forward; the girl’s
face was very beautiful with the sunset light
upon it.

She brought one of her arms forward from
behind the tree, and held up her hand with
a forbidding gesture. Anthony stopped—
more than stopped; he drew back again to
his former place.

‘I mean what I say,’ Rhoda said. ‘You

tell me I do not know what love is ; but how can I judge if you are right, if you do not tell me what it ought to be ?

Anthony did not answer at once, and she added in a lower tone :

‘ If you know.’

‘ If I know——’ Anthony began, then pulled himself up. ‘ I cannot tell you,’ he said.

‘ And you do not wish to question me any more ?’

‘ No.’

‘ Then we will go on.’

Rhoda drew herself upright, and came a step or two away from the tree.

‘ And yet,’ said Anthony, ‘ there are questions I should like to ask you — if I dared.’

The girl took up her old position by the tree, except that her arms hung before her now, the hands loosely clasped.

‘ Dare,’ she said.

‘Then—if I dare—what is it you mean by love? I cannot believe you know.’

She waited a minute, her eyes on the ground; her face had a doubtful, thoughtful look. Presently she glanced up.

‘If I answer by questions, will you answer my questions?’

‘As far as I can.’

‘Is there admiration in love?’

‘Yes.’

‘I admire strength; and Paul is strong.’

There was a pause; the light was growing fainter; the wind in the trees had a sighing, mournful sound.

‘Well,’ said Anthony presently, ‘and the questions?’

‘I cannot ask them, and I cannot answer you. Leave me to my life!’

There was a break in the girl’s voice as she said the last words, and something both of appeal and defiance in her eyes. She did not give Anthony time to answer her, but,

turning suddenly, strode on towards the house. Anthony followed her, but she did not turn or look at him again; and as soon as they reached Heather Den, she went into the curtained room, and he did not see her any more that night.

CHAPTER X.

And music lifted up the listening spirit
Until it walked exempt from mortal care,
God-like, o'er the clear billows of sweet sound.

SHELLEY.

ALL through the week Anthony saw very little of Rhoda Wichelow. The greater part of the day she was in the fields working with the haymakers, and every evening after supper she went outside to her lover. Once Anthony said to her: 'Have you known Paul Garnet long?' And she answered: 'All my life.'

But he had very little opportunity of speaking to her. At mealtime old Boniface, a silent, observing presence, was a constraint

on even the simplest, most ordinary, conversation; and in any case Anthony would have found it almost impossible to talk in an ordinary way with Rhoda. For the first few days he made no effort to see her: he told himself that he could not be really interested in a girl who was going to be married to another man: and he did not go into the fields to seek her, nor into the woods to hear her sing. But on Thursday morning he waited in the passage till she should go out, and when he saw her coming, he placed himself in the doorway, barring her exit.

‘Do you still sing?’ he said.

‘Yes.’

‘This evening, too?’

‘Yes. But you must not come.’

‘Why not?’

‘I like better to be with my people alone.’

She made a little movement forward as

though she wished to pass him, and he drew to one side and let her go.

The great silence that had brooded over Heather Den during the first few days of Anthony's stay there was faintly broken now ; all day long a breeze that came and went stirred the leaves in the woods to a gentle rustling every little while, and at night with a sighing sound it crept about the house. Very often he lay awake and listened to it as it mingled with the murmur of Rhoda Wichelow's voice in the room below ; and as night after night the two sounds mixed themselves in his ear, they grew at last into a melody that he heard, sang, saw in his mind written out in harmonies, and longed to play.

It was a quiet, gray evening ; the light breeze that had blown for many days was still ; a thin haze lay upon the heath and veiled the sunset ; the twilight came a little earlier than its wont. Anthony Dexter and

old Wichelow sat at supper in the room: Rhoda had not come in. The old man hurried through his meal, and rose from the table before Anthony had finished eating.

‘I must go,’ he said. ‘I have business to-night.’

‘You are going out?’

‘Ay.’

‘Have you far to go?’

‘There is no house near at hand.’

The old man was buckling on a pair of old weather-beaten gaiters which he kept in the chimney corner, and wore always when he went out.

‘It will soon be dark,’ said Anthony.

‘I know my way in the dark as well as in the light.’

‘I believe you can see in the dark,’ said Anthony.

Old Wichelow had finished putting on his gaiters now, and rose up.

‘ You do not want to see when you know the way,’ he answered.

He went out of the room, and presently Anthony saw him pass the window with his slow, somewhat halting gait. Anthony stood gazing out on to the heath ; it looked very lonely to-night, and the quiet of the place was a burden. He began to long for sound—any sound ; and in a minute his longing was satisfied—and sweetly. From outside came the sound of a voice singing, and, faint though it was, he knew the voice at once ; it was Rhoda Wichelow’s. She sang the air that seemed to him part of herself, the air he had first heard her sing ; and as she came nearer, as she passed by the window where he watched, he heard, or seemed to know without definitely hearing, the words she sang :

‘ Hearts tired with beating all the weary years ;
But oh for the rest beyond !’

Her voice ceased when she reached the door of the house. Anthony heard her

footsteps in the passage and then on the stairs, and after a little while she came into the room. He went forward to meet her.

‘The supper is cold.’

‘I do not mind.’

‘If I had known you would be in so soon, I would have asked Sally to keep something hot for you; but I thought you would not come till your usual time—after the table had been cleared.’

‘I do not mind,’ Rhoda said again; ‘and I am very hungry.’

‘You did not come in to tea this afternoon.’

‘No; I could not come.’

‘Your grandfather has gone out,’ said Anthony presently.

‘Yes. It is Micah Yates’s rent day.’

‘Does he go for the rent, do you mean—at this hour?’

‘Micah would not be in before this hour.’

The girl went on eating her supper. Anthony watched her from his corner by the

window. In the dusk he could only see the outline of her figure, as she sat by the table ; her face was dim.

‘ You must be very tired,’ he said at last.

‘ Not very ; I do not tire easily. But I am tired.’

‘ Shall you go out to-night ?’

‘ Of course.’ Rhoda paused a minute, and then added : ‘ It is the only way of seeing Paul.’

‘ He could come in to-night,’ said Anthony. ‘ Your grandfather is out, and I can go away.’

Rhoda had risen ; she came over to the window, and stood not far from him looking through the panes. She did not speak, and presently he said :

‘ You need not go out.’

‘ I would rather go out.’ The girl leaned her head against the frame of the window ; her face was turned towards Anthony, but in the half-light he could not see it plainly. ‘ It is more natural to see Paul outside,’ she said. ‘ He is like the heath.’

‘How—if I may ask?’

‘It is wild and desolate’—she turned again and looked out of the window—‘but there is strength in it, and it holds you to it. Paul is like that.’

As she finished speaking, a whistle sounded through the stillness outside, and a dark figure came out of the haze towards the window. Rhoda Wichelow turned and left the room. Anthony, still standing by the window, saw her come out of the door on to the flagged space outside, saw Paul Garnet come near to her and kiss her, saw the two figures walk side by side on to the heath and disappear in the haze and the twilight, back again into that shadowy region of distance, wherein, his fancy told him, her lover held her with a spell.

He stood without moving, still looking out into the thickening night, till the room was quite dark, and only the last wan gleams of daylight still lingered on the heath. The

house seemed weird in its loneliness ; he listened, and could hear no sound ; he crossed the room, found his way along the passage to the outer door, and went forth into the less oppressive solitude outside. He stood still a few minutes, looking up at the sky that was a little clearer now ; then he walked on, not over the heath, but round by the back of the house towards the fields.

The fields, too, lay under the spell of silence that seemed almost part of the place ; only now and again came the faint tinkling of a bell, as some cow or sheep in the pasture-meadows changed its place or position ; the still, filmy air was weighted with the scent of the hay. Anthony Dexter stood leaning against a gate, looking up the dim slant of the hill ; and the melody that had its rise in the mingled murmur of the wind and of Rhoda's voice throbbed and wailed in his brain, till the longing to hear it, to embody it in outward sound, to pour out his heart in

the playing of it, grew strong to a strength that was torment. He sang it aloud, but his voice sounded weird and ghostly in the midst of the dark silence, and the harmonies that moved below the air still craved for utterance.

He turned from the gate, and walked back rapidly towards the house. The desire of his art was upon him, the desire to bring forth, to clothe in concrete form his own creation ; and all the passion, the exaltation, the keen joy and pain that creation brings, possessed and commanded his being. One way of deliverance, at any rate, he would find for the thing that struggled within him. He had brought with him no materials for the writing of music ; but in some way, however rudely and roughly, he would put down on paper, at least, the melody that cried in his heart and brain ; with the harmonies that gave to each note the just tone and spirit and delicate shade of meaning.

He hurried on towards the house ; he was

near it now, close to its walls ; he walked on towards the corner of the building to make his way round to the front ; he passed close to the window of Rhoda Wichelow's curtained room : and then he stopped and drew a long breath, for the window was open. A sudden thought came to him and made his heart beat faster. The piano was old, creaking, inadequate ; but it had a voice, poor and insufficient though it was, and he could make it speak ; and the desire to find some means of telling out the music that struggled for expression was strong and full and desperate. But Rhoda ? Could he dare to enter unbidden the room that was a sort of temple of her inward, hidden life, that knew perhaps the mystery lying behind the face he could not read, that was sacred from the intrusion even of the man she acknowledged as her lover ? The idea of entering it at her bidding carried with it something of profanation ; to enter it without her knowledge or

her will would be an outrage, a sacrilege. He hesitated; the thought of her face in anger or in scorn counselled him to flee from the temptation that beckoned to him through the open window; but the thought of her face brought the thought of her voice, and her voice belonged to the desire that clamoured for fulfilment.

And the desire conquered; it grew in strength with the possibility of satisfaction; it rose up in a mighty flood of longing, and drove all other thoughts and feelings before it. Anthony Dexter did not wait long in parley with himself; he put his hands upon the sill, drew himself up, and in two seconds he was in the room. It was dark, but he did not want light; he knew where the instrument stood; he found his way to it and sat down. It was open; he felt with his hands over the keys, and began to play.

As he played, heaven opened to him, the heaven of the artist whose god is his art;

and to all artists there are times when the God who created the gift of creation moves before them invisible, in a cloud whose vapours are ideals unexpressed, and a pillar whose fire is ecstasy. Through the open window the sounds that swelled up and filled the room floated out into the dark silent night ; to Anthony Dexter the room and the night, the heath and the loneliness, and Rhoda and Paul, became as nothing, or as featureless parts of one indefinable, rapturous emotion. The melody that had striven within him so long found voice at last ; the harmonies that had blended themselves in his brain came forth in full spreading chords : in the melody was the sob of the wandering wind ; in the chords the impalpable sense of mystery that floated in the rhythm and wail of the air as it had sung itself into being.

He played on and on, varying the harmonies and the key, and the march and phrasing of the melody ; now letting the

chords ripple beside it in quick, fleeting notes ; now piling them together in full, rich strength ; now robbing them note by note till harmony was almost dead ; now letting a discord break and flash upon their satisfying beauty. As he played, the old faulty instrument beneath his hands seemed to gather power and sweetness of tone ; his spirit seemed to enter into and possess the strings ; richer, fuller, grander, stronger, more eloquent of passion and of longing, were the sounds that floated out to the woods and the heath and lost themselves amongst the trees or in space ; and the heart of the man throbbed with delight, and his soul rejoiced. The time went on, but he held no count of time ; the emotion that swayed him, like all emotion, when it rises above a certain height, carried him beyond time into a state wherein time stands aside, while eternity shows itself behind the ages.

There were other sounds amidst the night's

silence, and there was light not far from the darkness amidst which he played ; but he was conscious of nothing but his music ; and the thought that it was getting late, and that the owners of the house would be coming back, never stirred his brain. But at last there came a sound that broke in upon his abstraction, the swishing sound of metal rings drawn rapidly along a rod ; and the door was opened, and a figure, dark against the light behind, stood in the doorway, the pushed-back curtain falling thickly at one side of it. Then Anthony Dexter came back into time, and the life of Heather Den : suddenly the music stopped, and his hands slid off the keys, and he sat abashed, confused, and silent.

Rhoda Wichelow stood in the doorway, silent too ; but behind her a voice said : ' You are an accomplished musician, Mr. Dexter ; ' and the face of Paul Garnet looked in over the girl's shoulder.

Anthony rose, and came out of the dark-

ness into the light of the room. Old Wiche-low sat on the settle, blinking his eyes.

‘You’re favoured,’ he said, pointing with one finger to the doorway across which Rhoda was drawing the curtain. ‘Neither the old man, nor’—he looked at Paul—‘nor the young one, is allowed in there.’

‘I went in,’ began Anthony; ‘I ——’

He broke off; there was nothing that he could say.

Rhoda had come away from the doorway, and was standing now with her face towards him; but she did not speak; she moved a little closer to Paul Garnet’s side. It was Paul who broke the silence.

‘The organ, I believe, is your instrument, Mr. Dexter?’ he said.

‘Yes.’

‘There is an organ at the Hall. It would give me great pleasure if you would come on Sunday afternoon and show me how it ought to be played. I say Sunday, because that is

the only afternoon that Miss Wichelow considers herself free, and I know that she would like to hear you play.'

'You are very kind,' stammered Anthony ; 'but I—I will not intrude upon you.'

'Intrusion and an invited guest can have nothing in common,' said Paul Garnet. 'I shall take it amiss if you do not come. And besides,' he went on, a half-smile lighting his dark face, 'you owe Miss Wichelow some amends for the—shall I call it intrusion? which your genius has led you into this evening. You cannot refuse compensation.'

'Miss Wichelow shall command me,' said Anthony stiffly.

He looked at Rhoda. She put a hand on Paul's arm, and standing thus, and looking back at Anthony, said :

'Come.'

CHAPTER XI.

The fire i' the flint
Shows not till it be struck.

SHAKESPEARE.

THE night had come; the lights were all put out at Heather Den—all but two. One burned in Anthony's room, and one in the room below, where Rhoda, kneeling on the floor, prayed in quaint, cant phrases to be delivered from the devil's wiles. Overhead Anthony listened to the low murmur of her voice. He sat by the open window; the murky sky made the night dark, hiding the stars, and there was no moon. He was overwrought, tired, depressed, miserable; the reaction from the burning mood of the

evening was upon him ; and he lived again and again through that minute when Rhoda Wichelow, standing in the doorway of the sanctuary he had violated, had made him no reproach but silence.

The wind was still to-night ; the woods, whose rustling leaves had whispered to him in melody during many past nights, were still too ; everywhere a stretching-out of the silence that would neither blame nor forgive ; and through it all the low, vague murmur of the voice he longed, yet dreaded to hear, in louder speech. The man's strong, nervous hands gripped the window-ledge as he sat ; he suffered, not appreciating the full meaning and purport of his suffering ; not understanding either the depth or the nature of the feeling that Rhoda Wichelow had awakened in him ; not knowing that the interest which had arisen in curiosity had developed into something of more imperative force. The reaction from strong emotion

made him weary ; the presence of fresh emotion, humiliating and bitter, made him restless ; he paced to and fro, seeking relief and finding none, waiting till bodily exhaustion should bring ease to his tired mind. And still the murmur of the voice below, and still the quiet in the woods, and the unstirring calm of the air.

But at last there came a break in the silence with the sound in it ; the voice was hushed, and the stillness was freed from the note of complaining that had seemed to fill it. Anthony was close to his door when the voice ceased. He stopped his restless walking and listened ; then hastily, with a sudden impulse, he opened the door and stepped out on to the landing. He stood hesitating ; the candle he held cast a flickering, uncertain light out into the dense darkness ; the house was full of great black shadows, thick as substance. Then, far off, he heard the sound of a faint footfall on the stone floor

of the passage, and saw beyond the blackness the ghost of a light struggling to rise from below. Rhoda was coming.

Anthony did not pause to think ; he moved forward quickly along the length of the landing to the head of the staircase and began to descend. He met Rhoda about half-way down. She stopped two steps below him ; her face looked up at him out of a deep darkness : the light of his candle shone down upon it and showed it plainly ; her own candle threw an upward light upon her throat and chin.

They stood through a little space of silence. Her eyes were calm, and held a spirit of peace : Anthony's eyes were troubled, and his lips moved nervously.

‘ You will never forgive me,’ he whispered at last.

‘ Yes,’ she said.

‘ I was mad,’ he went on, ‘ when I did it.’

‘ No, not you ; it was the music.’

‘You can never understand how it was,’ he persisted.

She narrowed her eyes, looking up at him.

‘I can understand.’

‘Can you?’

It was as if a spirit moved across the face of his mood, troubling the humility, the abject self-abasement, that lay there; and from the depths beneath there rose to the ruffled surface other impulses—less pure than the one that had led him hither, other thoughts—more selfish.

‘Can you understand?’ he said. ‘Can music indeed conquer you?’

One hand resting on the banisters, the wavering light of the candles playing on her face, she still looked up at him, but did not answer. But the peace in her eyes was broken, and the mystery of her face came forth.

‘Is it true?’ he said—‘is it true that there is in music something that calls—commands you?’

She still paused. A quiver moved her lips, and then at last :

‘ Alas !’ she said, ‘ it is true.’

‘ Why alas ?’ He came down a step, a little nearer to her. ‘ Why should it be alas ?’

Her eyes had a sort of fear in them ; she answered in a broken voice :

‘ Because the thing—the power is evil.’

‘ How so ?’

His voice, his air, grew more authoritative as hers became feebler. She answered him obediently :

‘ Before you came it was beauty—all that I knew ; and I had power over it.’

‘ And now ?’

‘ Now the beauty has a terror and a horror in it, and the power——’

‘ Yes ?’

‘ Is in it, not me.’

‘ I almost thought so.’

He spoke with a slow triumph.

‘ Let me go,’ she said.

‘ Not yet. Is it all evil ?’

She answered quickly :

‘ Oh no ! If it were——’

‘ Yes ?’

‘ I could conquer it.’

‘ There is good too ?’

‘ Let me go,’ she said again.

He barred her way.

‘ You must answer me.’

‘ Then I will tell you,’ she said with sudden, fierce energy, ‘ that in the music that you make there are heights and depths I never knew or dreamed of. It is worship, and it is hell.’

Then all at once her candle was out, and, with a quick movement that took him un-awares, she had reached up and grasped his hand that held the light, and it was all darkness. In the darkness she fled by him up the stairs, and he was left alone, and the quiet swept through the house again.

CHAPTER XII.

If any strength we have, it is to ill ;
But all the good is God's, both power and eke will.

SPENSER.

FANELANDS HALL lay low in a hollow near the edge of the woods. The trees came close to it on all sides but one, where narrow fields led down to a stretch of common land. The house had a neglected air : the shutters were closed in most of the windows ; the creepers that climbed the stained, red-brick walls hung drooping in untrained disorder ; in the garden the grass grew rank and tall, and weeds rose side by side with such hardy flowers as came up and bloomed untended year after year.

The trees nearest to the house were the abode of many rooks, and all day long their cawing voices made a melancholy accompaniment to the empty solitude of the place.

Paul Garnet's father had been a gambler, and the son lived frugally, wiping off year by year the heavy mortgages which had descended to him together with the estate.

On Sunday, the third of July, the brilliant sunshine, the rich, full green of the foliage, the glory and beauty of a summer's day, drove away the look of desolation from the garden, and gave a certain air of warmth and life even to the house with its closed windows and weather-beaten walls. Paul Garnet and Rhoda Wichelow came out of the woods and took their way to what had once been the flower-garden. It was partially enclosed by a wall, and against the wall was a wooden summer-house, covered with straggling creepers; they entered it and sat down. The air was full of summer sounds: the

chirping of grasshoppers, the hum of insects, the song of birds ; and behind these sounds was the hoarse, constant cawing of the rooks. Rhoda sat looking out at a tangled growth of half-wild roses opposite the summer-house ; Paul looked at Rhoda's face.

‘The time is coming near,’ he said at last.

‘What time ?’

‘The time when you and I will have one name, one life, one being. I am no longer so hard pressed, Rhoda ; I can marry you now.’

‘Now ?’

‘When you will ; it is for you to decide.’

She turned to him quickly.

‘Let it be soon,’ she said.

Paul rose up.

‘Come into the house ; I have something to show you.’

He walked on through the narrow, overgrown paths, and Rhoda followed him. He entered the house, not by the chief entrance,

but by a smaller door at the side, opening into a narrow passage. The passage led into a large hall, shaped like the letter L ; the chief part of it was the height of the whole house, and along one side, high up in the wall, was a row of little windows, lighting a corridor above ; the smaller part was only the height of the neighbouring rooms, and from it the staircase opened, winding round and round to the upper story. The hall was lighted by a high window on each side of the front-door, and by another facing the door, big, mullioned, filled with stained glass. All round the walls doors opened off into the several rooms, and opposite the open fireplace half-way down the hall was a large organ.

Paul Garnet opened a door near the fireplace, and Rhoda followed him into the room into which it led. The shutters were folded back in this room, and the warm sunlight streamed in upon white-panelled walls. Rhoda looked about her in amaze-

ment. The windows were draped with curtains of rich old damask ; a soft, thick carpet covered the floor ; furniture, carved, inlaid, of various styles, but all beautiful and costly, stood against the walls and out in the room ; there were ornaments on the mantelpiece, and books and china in the cabinets.

‘ Do you like it ? ’ asked Paul.

‘ What is it ? ’ the girl said in a low, almost awe-struck voice.

‘ It is salvage,’ answered Paul—‘ the little that escaped from the wreck. From the resources of the whole house, Rhoda, I have only been able to furnish you one room.’

Rhoda still looked about her ; a flush of pleasure rose to her face.

‘ Oh, I like it ! ’ she said.

‘ Yes,’ said Paul, ‘ I knew you would like it. And the pictures,’ he went on, ‘ do you like them too ? They are the only ones I did not sell.’

There were only three pictures in the room. One was large, a full-length portrait

of a woman, with a young, sweet, rather dreamy face : the others were small ; a landscape and a woman's head. Rhoda looked first at the portrait.

‘ Who is it ? ’ she asked.

‘ My mother. They say it is like her ; I never knew her, as you know.’

‘ And this one ? Ah ! ’

Rhoda had turned to the picture nearest to her : it was a view of the heath and the woods near Heather Den, and the painter had caught something of the spirit that brooded over the heath and haunted the woods, and so had made a picture with life and truth in it. The girl looked at it in silence ; at last she turned, and her eyes glanced round the room again.

‘ There and here,’ she said in a low voice.

‘ Here is waiting for you. When will you come ? ’

‘ But for my grandfather,’ she answered, ‘ and the people, I would come to-morrow.’

‘Your grandfather! What is he to you?’

‘It will go hard with him to let me go.’

‘I will engage that he shall let you go.’

Rhoda looked into his eyes.

‘Yes,’ she said; then she added, ‘But the people. If I am not there to stand by them?’

‘And I—am I nothing?’

She looked at him again; his eyes seemed to draw and hold her gaze.

‘You know,’ she said at last.

‘Look at the other picture,’ said Paul.

She moved along by the wall till she faced the picture of the woman’s head; she stood looking at it in silence, and Paul, standing near her, looked at both it and her.

‘It is the most valuable picture of the whole collection,’ he said at last. ‘My grandfather got it by a curious chance when he was quite a young man travelling in Italy. It is said to be an original, but whether it is or not, it has all the spirit, all the characteristics, of Leonardo’s work.’

Rhoda still looked at the picture, and did not answer.

‘I could have sold it for a larger sum than many of the other pictures,’ said Paul. ‘Do you know why I did not sell it?’

She answered, without taking her eyes from the picture :

‘It is like me.’

‘You see the likeness?’

‘I feel it. The woman there,’ Rhoda went on after a pause, ‘had the same feelings in her that I have. She might have been——’

‘An angel,’ said Paul, as she hesitated, as all women are.’

‘Or——’

Rhoda stopped again.

‘A devil, as all women might be.’

‘In the face there,’ Rhoda said, ‘the devil has won.’

Paul laughed gently.

‘I think so.’

The girl turned to him suddenly.

‘Am I really like her?’

He still smiled.

‘Potentially.’

‘You can see the devil in my face?’

‘I hope so.’

She gave a little quick cry.

‘Ah! if I could cast it out.’

Paul Garnet put his hands upon her shoulders, and bent his face close to hers.

‘Don’t try,’ he said. ‘I believe that your potential wickedness is that which chiefly feeds my love. You could never have grown into my being till you had become what you are—part of myself, if your nature had been as simple and stainless as your outward life has been.’

‘You do not know,’ she answered. ‘If it should lead me, drive me, this devil that you say you love, away from you?’

He smiled again.

‘It cannot; I am stronger than the strongest part of you.’

‘Are you sure? And you are not always there!’

‘I soon shall be. But even so, in the meantime, I have no fear; and I like to try, to prove my strength.’

Her eyes looked up at him doubtfully.

‘You have always ruled me,’ she said; ‘but you do not understand me quite.’

‘Do I not?’

‘The bad in me’—she spoke dreamily, slowly, pausing for her words; her eyes had very much the expression of the picture’s eyes, Paul thought—‘the bad and the strongest part of me have quickened into life together; they are joined, or circumstances have joined them, and it—that something that holds my highest and my lowest—is something you cannot enter into.’

‘You are quite sure?’ he asked.

She gazed at him, a vague trouble in her face.

‘Ah, Paul!’ she said suddenly; ‘I fear it.’

‘Fear what?’

She had not time to answer; as he spoke, the door was thrown open and Paul’s house-keeper announced:

‘Mr. Dexter.’

CHAPTER XIII.

He feels he has a fist, then folds his arms
Crosswise and makes his mind up to be meek.

R. BROWNING.

THE low sun streamed through the stained-glass window in the hall, throwing strips and patches of colour on its dark floor. In the deep seat below the window sat Rhoda and Paul, side by side, he a little turned towards her so that he could see her profile, she looking straight down the hall. Anthony Dexter sat at the organ, and the hall was filled with the sound of the music that he made. He had been playing for half an hour, and all the time Rhoda had sat quite still, listening, her

hands lying quiet in her lap, her eyes looking into a world of music, in which were no clear thoughts or distinct pictures, but all was vague and indefinite; and always Paul looked at her with a sort of watchfulness in his look. Little Rufus Stockbridge, with a clean collar and a sweating face, worked away steadily at the bellows. He thought the great swelling sounds that came from the instrument very grand and beautiful, and that he was the chief agent in producing them.

Anthony had played Mozart, Bach, a suite of Corelli's, and a toccata of Galuppi's, and through it all Rhoda had sat quite still. Now and again her colour changed and her breath was drawn more quickly; but the old music, simple in spirit though elaborate in form, created in her an emotion so gentle that its flow was rest, so solemn that it carried her out of and above the everyday atmosphere of her thoughts and

feelings, and made peace between her spirit and her nature. Then came a pause, and she knew that she was sitting beneath the great stained window at Fanelands, that Paul was watching her, and that it was Anthony Dexter who had called forth the sounds now dying away in the corners of the hall.

Paul rose from his seat and walked down to the organ.

‘You are tired perhaps, Mr. Dexter?’

‘Oh no.’

The light of the music was in Anthony’s eyes. He had begun to play simply as a man who had a professional knowledge of his instrument and his art ; now the musician was awake in him, and he forgot for the time that he had come to Fanelands against his will, and that his host was to him as an enemy.

‘Will you play on, then?’ Paul said ; and Anthony played on.

Still the ancient music, solemn or blithe-

some ; and still Rhoda listened, self-contained and enjoying ; and Paul listened, with the appreciation born of knowledge and culture. But when the next pause came, Paul rose again and went over to the musician's side.

‘ Play something modern,’ he said.

Anthony looked up at him. There was a curious expression on Paul's face—of defiance, with a touch of the old insolence. As Anthony met his gaze, his own expression altered, and a challenge sprang up in his eyes. He bowed his head without speaking, and before Paul had reached his seat again, the hurrying notes of one of Schumann's wildest moods were pressed forth from the organ's pipes.

Paul sat down and looked at Rhoda. The girl's colour had risen, and her hands, lying so peacefully before her, moved gradually, bit by bit, one towards the other, till each clasped and held its fellow ; then, as the fantastic whirl rushed on, she sat upright instead of leaning back against the cushions,

and a brighter light burned in her eyes. Still the music, though it called to her and her emotional nature answered to the call, left her master of the excited spirit within her, and Paul, watching her, saw that her self-possession remained to her yet. When the tumult was stilled, and Anthony with soft modulations passed during a minute or two from key to key, he leaned towards her.

‘Do you like it?’

‘Yes.’

‘Look at me, Rhoda.’

She turned to him.

‘Yes,’ he said, ‘the Leonardo eyes tell me that you do.’

‘Are they——’

She stopped suddenly. Anthony had reached the key he sought, and now, after a moment’s silence to let the sound of his own chords perish, he struck the opening chords of the overture to ‘Tannhäuser.’ Slow and strange the sounds swept out and

filled the hall, swept up its length through the fading, coloured light from the stained window, fell upon Rhoda Wichelow's ear, and struck some answering chord in her being that throbbed and thrilled and almost winced at the touch. The colour died out of her face, and left it pale; her lips trembled; her hands, unclasped, clutched at the folds of her dress. The magic, significant harmonies followed one upon the other in the slow, weighty march of the melody, and Rhoda listened with a wonder that awed and troubled her, yet left her quite still; but when the chord sounded that comes at the beginning of the thirteenth bar, she uttered a sharp, low cry; the combination of notes smote her as with physical pain, and she half rose from her seat. Then Paul, very gently, touched her arm with his hand. She turned on him a momentary glance, and sank back on to the seat. He still kept his touch upon her, and she sat

bending forward, her eyes looking out of the light into the dusky space in the middle of the hall, where the dim form of the musician bent over the organ's keys ; and as the slow majesty of the opening passed into the passion that grows and grows as the overture proceeds, she felt something of the wild emotion, saw something of the weird unearthly scenes, that Wagner felt and saw when he wrote 'Tannhäuser.'

The music ceased at last ; only the ghost of it lingered in the air. Rufus Stockbridge wiped his brow, and began to think that though music was a fine thing, and mighty easy in the making, a lad had enough of it after a time. Anthony Dexter sat with hands that drooped beside him, his face aglow. Rhoda was motionless, a cold reaction trampling down the fever of her emotion, though her heart still quivered and throbbed. Paul took his hand from her arm, but kept his eyes upon her face. Then

suddenly Anthony raised his hands to the keys again, and leaned forward ; Rufus Stockbridge with a sigh set manfully to work, and once again the silence fled before the organ's voice.

And now Anthony played the air that he had played two nights before in Rhoda's curtained room ; the air that had been born in him from the mingling of her voice with the wind, that seemed to him to bear a part of her and all himself in it, that yet made him almost forget himself and her and all the world as the spirit in it found utterance. It was very different, this great organ, from the creaking, limited piano ; now his conception came forth in a body of sound that gave it adequate expression ; and he clothed it with all the shades of passion and of meaning of which he was consummate master. And Rhoda sat still at first, with an intense, almost apparent, stillness that told of effort and constraint.

The dusk was deepening now ; the colours on the dark floor were growing dim ; through the tall windows on either side of the big door the sky showed pale and gray. Then once again Rhoda rose to her feet, and once again Paul touched her arm. This time she did not turn to him, nor did she go back to her seat ; she only stood still, and, motionless, seemed to wait, to hover between two conflicting influences that drew her, one forward, one back, and held her powerless between them.

The patches of colour grew paler and paler as the light faded ; the dusk grew in the centre of the hall ; the bending form of Anthony Dexter was dim and undefined. He had piled up a mass of chords about the melody that he played ; he had almost hidden it in a torrent of rushing notes ; he had let it peep forth from a network of intricate variations ; now he let it die quite away, while with one hand he played a few slow,

faint notes. In that little pause Rhoda drew a deep breath, and the intense stillness of her attitude was relaxed.

Then Anthony reached up and drew out another stop, and once more the melody arose, breathed forth in slow simplicity. The wailing sound of it was intensified now ; the cry and the sadness in it bore an added strength : Rhoda obeyed that mysterious part of herself which answered instinctively to certain tones and harmonies ; she took a step forward.

Paul's hand was still upon her arm, and he tightened his grasp. She paused, and in the pause Anthony altered the time and rhythm of the air ; the voice of the organ sang it now with a lilt and a restless, striving passion that had in it something both of mocking and despair. Then Rhoda forgot everything but the music's power. Paul rose, and his hand pressed heavily upon her ; but she did not heed him, hardly noticed

that he tried to hold her back ; she still moved on ; and Paul, with a curious look upon his face, drew back, and let her go. On she went, step by step, down the darkening hall, nearer and nearer to the dim, bent form : and when she had nearly reached it, Anthony Dexter turned his face towards her and smiled.

From the window-seat Paul Garnet, a dark blot against the faded colours of the irregular, leaded panes, watched the two shadowy figures : he could not see the face of either of them, but he could see that Rhoda drew nearer and nearer to the organ and to the man who played it. She was very near now ; she bent towards him ; and he played on, looking back at her, the smile still upon his face.

Then he altered the time again, and the stops, and now it was a march of devils that she listened to. All the wailing, all the sadness of despair, was gone : the

music was full of turbulent triumph, of wild, intemperate impulses, of unholy rejoicing; and as Rhoda listened, her eyes grew furtive, and a half-frightened, half-reckless look came into her face.

Anthony's face was white; his lips moved slightly; the smile still lingered as he whispered:

‘Will you come?’

‘Where?’ With a little backward movement Rhoda said the word.

‘Wherever I choose to lead.’

Paul Garnet had risen from his seat; he strode down the hall; he stood by the organ's side, half hidden from view, and watched Rhoda's bending figure and Anthony's face, gleaming white amidst the shadows.

‘Wherever I choose to lead,’ Anthony said; and the onward rush of the music seemed to expect and compel an answer to his will. Would Rhoda give it? She bent

a little forward ; her lips parted ; and then Paul came forward.

He stood by Rhoda's side ; he put his hand under her chin, and turned her face towards his own ; but he did not speak.

The music went on, fiercer, sadder, rising in a tempest of mad abandonment, sinking into a low cry of despair ; and the two upright figures remained motionless ; and the musician still looked back, the smile set and hard on his pale face.

Paul's dark eyes grew confident as he waited. Presently he took his hand from under the girl's upturned face ; still she did not move, and the confidence in his eyes deepened.

Then at last he spoke :

' Come.'

He turned and walked slowly away, and Rhoda followed him.

When they reached the window-seat, there was no sound but the sound of their own

movements ; suddenly the music had ceased, and a great desolate silence filled the hall. Silence and loneliness ; the two came side by side, for when Paul turned and looked at Rhoda they were alone.

CHAPTER XIV.

The thorn comes forth with the point forwards.

GEORGE HERBERT.

WHEN Anthony Dexter reached Heather Den, he found old Wichelow sitting in the room smoking. It was dark, for Anthony had wandered a long time on the heath before seeking the shelter of the house ; but a sort of instinct, aided by a smell of tobacco, assured him that the old man occupied his usual seat on the settle, and in a moment, and as Anthony was about to leave the room, Boniface spoke.

‘ Well ? ’ he said.

‘ Oh, you are there, Mr. Wichelow ? ’

Anthony answered. 'I am going upstairs, so I will not disturb you.'

'Do not go ; I want to talk to you.'

'I am too tired to talk,' said Anthony irritably.

He spoke truly ; he was more than tired, he was exhausted by the emotional excitement and the mental conflict he had passed through. The reaction brought him unstrung nerves, and a sense of bitter humiliation.

'I know,' said old Wichelow, 'that you do not like the darkness. You shall have light.'

He rose, and began to feel along the mantelpiece for the matchbox.

'No, I do not want light. To-night the darkness is better.'

Anthony sat down, lacking the energy to resist Boniface Wichelow's importunity.

'Ah!' said the old man, 'you have told me what I wanted to know.'

'How? What do you mean?'

Anthony spoke languidly; there was no room in his mind for any interests but his own.

‘I know,’ said Boniface, ‘why Paul made you go to Fanelands to-day.’

‘What do you mean?’ asked Anthony again, but his words now were sharp and quick.

‘He thinks himself’—the old man spoke slowly, pausing now and again between his words to take a whiff of his pipe—‘he thinks himself the strongest—the strongest of all.’

‘I do not understand you.’

‘No? Well—but I thought you were not all fool.’

‘I am obliged to you.’

‘I suppose so.’

The old man was silent for a little, and Anthony also did not speak.

‘All people are fools,’ Boniface said after a time, ‘who care much about anything—except money. That you have by you, and you can count it and keep it.’

‘Till you die.’

‘I am speaking of life, not death,’ said old Wichelow, with a sudden sharpness in his voice. ‘And, besides, what else can you take with you when you die? Not music, or—love.’

Anthony gave a short laugh.

‘Certainly not love.’

‘Rhoda’s mother,’ Boniface went on, ‘she was just such another—all for music and reading and flightiness.’ The old man’s voice sank suddenly. ‘It couldn’t save her at the end. If she had put by, it would have been different.’

‘She was in want?’

‘Oh, no, no, no! She lived here. I gave her everything—the neighbours will tell you—everything she wanted. And Rhoda will tell you—she was fifteen; five years ago it was—Rhoda will tell you all I spent and gave her. For the books, nobody could blame me for selling the books. It was such a long illness.’

Anthony sat and listened abstractedly ; the old man's sudden garrulousness wearied him. But the outburst of talk was succeeded by a long spell of silence, and by-and-by, as a fuller consciousness of the present broke in upon his thoughts, Anthony began to wish that his companion would speak again ; anything was better than the sense of watchfulness that always seemed to accompany Boniface Wichelow's dumb presence in the darkness. But before the silence had grown oppressive the old man broke it.

‘ So it is not strong enough,’ he said—‘ the music ?’

‘ For what ?’

‘ To woo her away.’

Anthony's heart beat a little faster.

‘ Did you hope——’ he began, and stopped.

‘ Yes, I hoped it might.’

‘ Do you mean,’ said Anthony after a little pause, and with a half - laugh, ‘ that you

wished—hoped that I might induce this girl, who has bewitched me, to give up her lover for me?’

‘Ay. If you had,’ old Wichelow went on after a minute, ‘I would have given you a half or—or a third of my savings.’

‘You have not done much,’ said Anthony, ‘to further your hopes.’

‘There is a sort of justice in Paul, but no mercy,’ was all the answer old Wichelow gave.

There was another space of silence, and then Anthony rose to his feet.

‘I leave you to-morrow,’ he said.

‘You must pay for the week,’ said Boniface.

Anthony did not answer. He went upstairs to his room and shut himself into a lonely darkness; then he abandoned himself to a passion of misery and self-reproach. He knew now that the feeling he had towards Rhoda Wichelow was not curiosity or interest, but love; the knowledge had

come to him fully in that moment when, looking back from the organ into the dusk behind, he had seen her moving with slow steps towards him ; and with the knowledge had come the temptation to see how far the power of the music would lead her ; whether it were strong enough in its wildest, if not in its highest, form, to win her from the lover she had known all her days, to himself, the lover who appealed to her through the emotional instincts which his art had awakened and excited in her complex nature. He suffered now with all the keenness that a vain nature endures when it falls below its own opinion of itself ; for Anthony, though his standard of the conduct of life was not high, being that of the ordinary man of the world, felt that he had sinned against the accepted code of honour : he suffered from the mortification of failure ; and failure in a contest with Paul Garnet was unspeakably bitter to him : he suffered from the

hopelessness of a love that had all the fiery passion of a highly-strung, emotional temperament. All night he did not rest, or even seek to rest: his desire and his one dread equally was to leave the place that was filled for him now with humiliation and suffering, and yet had held for him keener happiness than any he had hitherto known outside his artistic inner life.

The night wore away and the morning came, and in its gray light the strained physical powers gave way to the exhaustion that inevitably succeeds violent emotion; and Anthony fell asleep on the floor, his head lying close to the little table on which, before his arrival, Rhoda Wichelow had placed a glass of flowers to greet the musician of her dream.

CHAPTER XV.

And, behold ; at eveningtide trouble.

ISAIAH.

THE next morning Anthony and Rhoda did not meet. The hay had all been carried now, and there was no need for the girl to continue to help the workers in the fields ; but when Anthony came down to breakfast—rather late, for he feared, while he yet hoped to see her—she had already gone out. His intention had been to leave Heather Den early in the morning ; yet he could not make up his mind to go ; and when dinner-time came, he had begun no preparations for his journey.

Rhoda did not come in ; Anthony sat at the

table hardly tasting his food, his eyes casting continual glances at the window, his ears straining to catch some sound of her coming.

‘You leave to-day?’ said old Boniface, looking at him across the table.

‘Yes.’

‘You should have started after breakfast, then. The only fast train in the day leaves Breybridge at twelve o’clock.’

‘Why didn’t you tell me that before?’

‘You wouldn’t have started any the earlier if I had; you would have stayed on just the same.’

‘No, I——’ began Anthony, and stopped; he knew that old Wichelow spoke the truth.

‘I will wait now till to-morrow morning,’ he said presently.

‘You will not see Rhody,’ said the old man; and after a pause he added: ‘The slow train goes at five.’

‘You mean that your grand-daughter will not come back till I have gone?’

Old Wichelow, slowly munching a bit of bread, nodded his head with an almost imperceptible nod, but did not speak.

‘I will stay at Breybridge to-night,’ said Anthony. ‘I shall be out of Miss Wichelow’s way this afternoon.’

He rose from the table, and went up to his room to pack his clothes ; but instead of packing, he sat down on the window-ledge and looked out at the sloping fields and at the woods, and let the time drift by unheeded. It was a changeful day : from time to time the sun shone brilliantly, then was hidden by gray, chasing clouds ; the wind blew with moderate persistent strength that swelled now and again to little angry gusts ; there was a feeling of coming rain in the air. Anthony looked at the fields with the fleeting lights on them, and round the bare, poorly-furnished room, and it seemed to him that he had been a very long time at Heather Den, that the whole of his life, his real life, had been lived there, and that all that had gone

before had been but a dream, whose unreality only became apparent now that he was awake. He thought of the past years vaguely ; his struggles, first for a livelihood, then for fame ; his passionate pursuit of his art, and his delight in it, strong enough at times to supply the place of fame, almost of bread ; the success that had begun to dawn upon him ; the sweetness of being recognised ; and it all seemed to him now but dust and ashes in comparison with Rhoda Wichelow's love. The artist in him was sunk in the man, and the artist was far finer and greater than the man part of this man, so that as he sat and thought his heart was full of bitterness, and he could not look beyond his own suffering.

He was roused at last by a knocking at the door, and by Sally's voice telling him that tea was ready. The whole afternoon was gone, and he had done nothing. He called out to the woman that he wanted no tea, that he was about to start, and rising up

hastily, he began to pack his clothes into his portmanteau with all speed. A sudden longing came upon him to get away, to escape from the surroundings whose every detail held a memory of the happiness of the last ten days, and of the sufferings and mortification that had followed it; and he made his preparations with feverish haste. Still, it was some time before he was ready, and when at last he went down to the kitchen to give Sally directions about sending on his luggage, the light had begun to fade. He stood for a minute outside the door of the room; there was no sound within, and he did not know whether Boniface Wichelow were there; but he did not wish to see the old man, and was about to pass on, when a voice said:

‘Come in, Mr. Dexter.’

Anthony barely crossed the threshold.

‘I am just going,’ he said.

‘I know.’

The old man was sitting in his usual

position on the settle ; its high back kept the light from his face.

‘ You have used a great many candles,’ he said, ‘ sitting up at night—more than I counted on in the agreement.’

‘ Will a shilling pay the difference ?’

Anthony put his hand in his pocket.

‘ Ye-yes.’

Anthony put down a shilling on the table.

‘ Good-bye, Mr. Wichelow !’ he said, and turned and left the room.

The old man rose from the settle, went over to the table, and, taking up the money, rung it once and again to satisfy himself that it was good.

Anthony Dexter meanwhile went out of the house, and crossed the road between the heath and the woods. He had to call at the little inn in Fanelands village to order a cart to bring his luggage over to Breybridge, and he took the same path he had taken the afternoon before, when at Paul Garnet’s invita-

tion he had gone down to play the organ at the Hall. There was a fluttering wind among the trees, and the leaves had an ominous rustle; the sunset was clouded to-night, and the dusk was making way under the thick curtain of foliage. A solitary bird piped now and again a single plaintive note: it reminded Anthony of the nightingale he had heard singing alone, on the evening of his arrival, when he had first entered the woods; and the thought of that other sound that had followed it, the singing of a clear, far-off voice, became so strong that he stopped and, turning his face in the direction of the open space, listened, almost expecting to hear it again. But the voice was dumb; there was no sound to-night but the heave and sigh of the wind amongst the trees; and suddenly he covered his face with his hands, feeling that he should never hear that sound again. And with his closed, darkened eyes he saw the form and face of Rhoda Wiche-

low ; he saw her standing in the midst of her grandfather's labourers, singing, as he had seen her first ; and he saw her as he had seen her under the music's spell, when the mystery of her face had seemed about to reveal itself in word or act. And then, with a groan, he let his hands drop quickly, and he turned about again, and he saw her standing before him.

Her eyes had a startled look, her lips were parted ; it seemed as though she had turned the angle of the path, and had come upon him suddenly, unawares, and in the moment in which he looked round. They stood and looked at one another, and neither of them spoke. Then at last Anthony drew a long breath.

‘You must have known,’ he said, ‘that I loved you.’

She bent her head very slightly ; she made no sound, but her lips moved and seemed to form the words ‘I knew.’

‘And I love you, must love you, through all the hell that life will be without you; and I shall never see you again.’

Still she did not speak; only her lips made ‘No.’

He stood and looked at her, his mouth trembling.

‘Do you know,’ he burst out suddenly and fiercely, ‘that you have spoiled and wrecked my life? Till I knew you, the music was enough, and more than enough, for me; I lived in it, and with it, and for it, in a glory and a happiness that belonged only to it and me. And now’—— He broke off. ‘Why did you do it?’ he cried; ‘I say, why did you do it?’

Then she spoke.

‘Ah, why?’ Her voice vibrated as though some trembling hand swept the chords that gave her speech; her eyes had a pleading, wonderful look that he had never seen in them before. ‘I warned you,’ she said; ‘I

told you that you must not come into and stir my life. I was not made for you, nor you for me.'

'By God!' he said; 'but we were made each one for the other. The stuff whereof I am fashioned, of that are you fashioned too; the music that holds for me life, and the meaning of life, works in your being too; the God that shows Himself to me in sound, raises you in sound to heaven too; the devil that is the shadow of that God, calling to me in harmonies of madness, calls to you too. Is it so, Rhoda? Do I speak the truth or no?'

'You speak the truth,' she said.

'And we were made the one for the other?'

She shook her head.

'I was made for Paul.'

'But if——'

She stopped him.

'You are the musician of my dream,' she said, 'but only of my dream. In the life

that I have always lived, and shall still live on, I belong to Paul. Hear me,' she went on, as he would have spoken. 'From my babyhood he has ruled me ; even during the years when he was away at school and travelling, he was still the centre of my life ; from my childhood I have never thought of, never wished for, any husband but Paul. There is an affinity between us that——'

'That ceases where the strongest part of you begins.'

'I do not know.'

'Is it not true that the part of you that music touches you have kept shut away from him?'

She bent her head.

'And in that part,' he said, 'the keynote of your nature, you belong to me.'

'In that, perhaps,' she said, 'but in nothing else.'

'You could not love me—as a man, not apart from, but beside the music?'

She looked at him with her most secret face ; for a long time—it seemed to him a very long time—she did not speak ; and while she waited, the wind, rising in a gust, swept through the trees with a rushing sound.

‘To be with you,’ she said at last, ‘is like a dream, a delirium ; to be with Paul is rest. He holds the tempest part of me in check ; with him I shall live long years of peace, confident in his strength.’

‘And with me——’

She made a little movement with her hands.

‘With you it would be ecstasy—for a very little while, and then—I do not know. It could not last.’

‘Choose the short ecstasy,’ he cried, ‘and come with me now. Come, Rhoda ! and let it last or die. A short, full joy is worth an eternity of dull, gray peace.’

He came quite close to her ; he reached out his hand to touch her. She was very

pale ; the pupils of her eyes dilated, looking forth from beneath the lids that drooped, half hiding them ; in her face lay all the composite charm, all the strange possibilities of the face that had won his curious admiration in the print in his room at home. Her breath came quickly and heavily, her bosom heaved ; almost she seemed to lean, to draw towards him ; then suddenly, and with a cry, she started back, and threw out her arms and turned her face skywards.

“ “And I looked and behold a pale horse,” ’ she said ; “ “and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him.” ’

She stood, looking up through the waving leaves to the sky, her arms outstretched as on a cross ; and on her face gradually the troubled, complex look gave way to the exaltation that Anthony had seen there when he first saw the face ; and he drew back, and stood abashed and waited. At last her arms dropped, and she turned to him.

‘All the night,’ she said, ‘I was on my knees. I knew that though I went away so as not to see you, I still should see you ; and I knew how it would be. And I knew’—her voice dropped—‘that if I went with you it would mean a dying of my soul, and that hell would follow.’ She moved a step forward. ‘Good-bye, Anthony Dexter,’ she said. ‘Our lives part here.’

‘Must they part?’ he asked.

His low voice trembled so that the words were hardly audible ; she did not heed, perhaps did not hear, them.

‘Let me pass!’ she said.

He drew to one side, and she passed him by, and was lost to him amongst the trees.

He stood for a long time after she had gone without moving, looking still along the path by which she had left him ; and all the time the wind blew, rustling the leaves ; and it seemed to him that it was the rustle of her garments that he heard as she fled on and

on, further and further away from him. At last, faint, far off, like the echo of the voice he had known, he seemed to hear sweet notes that came to him, scant and broken, in the pauses of the wind. He bent his head to listen; and then he knew that in the space amidst the trees, divided from him by a distance that had no measurement in space, Rhoda Wichelow stood amongst the toiling people whose lot she tried to share, and sang the song that he had first heard her sing; for dimly, but with a fulness of sound that travelled more surely than the scattered single notes, rose the longing cry of the refrain:

‘ But oh for the rest beyond !’

Then he turned, and walked on through the woods; and so Anthony Dexter left Heather Den.

BOOK II.

PAUL GARNET'S MARRIAGE.

Fuor della queta, nell' aura che trema ;
E vengo in parte ove non è che luca.

DANTE.

CHAPTER I.

What thou seest
Is but the ghost of thy forgotten dream,
A dream itself, yet less perhaps, than that
Thou call'st reality.

SHELLEY.

IN the late autumn Rhoda Wichelow and Paul Garnet were married; and it was through almost leafless trees that Rhoda walked up from Fanelands Hall to pay her first visit to Boniface Wichelow at Heather Den. The house was all shut up when she reached it, the windows securely fastened, the door barred, and it was some time before she could gain an entrance. At last, by dint of tapping on the kitchen window, she brought

Sally forth from the scullery, and presently the back-door was opened.

‘Why, miss — ma’am!’ exclaimed the woman. ‘I never thought to look on you to-day.’

‘And why not Sally?’

‘Married but two days? I thought surely you ’ld take a week to settle in.’

‘The settling was done beforehand.’

‘And looking just the same! The same frock — nobody ’ld believe it had took place.’

‘Did you think I should come in my bridal gown, Sally?’ asked Rhoda. ‘How is my grandfather?’

‘Him mopes.’

Rhoda stepped into the kitchen; she had been standing on the threshold during the short interchange of questions and answers.

‘Is he in?’

‘For sure.’

Rhoda stood for a minute holding out her bare hands towards the feeble blaze of a small

fire in the midst of the large hearth ; then took her way out of the kitchen, across the stone passage, and into the room.

Old Boniface sat on the settle ; he did not move or speak as the girl entered ; coming a step or two nearer to him, she saw that he was asleep. There was no fire in the room ; a charred piece of wood lay black amidst white ashes between the iron dogs ; the air felt damp and chill. Rhoda took a few rapid steps, and laid her hand upon the old man's shoulder.

‘Grandfather!’ she said. ‘Grandfather, wake up!’

Old Wichelow started, and sat suddenly upright, turning his head from side to side, and beating the air feebly with his hands.

‘Help!’ he cried, in a quavering voice. ‘Help! Ah, Rhody!’—a look of relief came into his troubled face, followed by one of scowling displeasure—‘why did you fright and startle me, girl?’ he said.

‘I did nothing to frighten you,’ Rhoda

answered. 'It is bad for you to sleep in this cold air.'

She left the room, and presently returned with her arms full of wood. She kneeled down by the hearth, and began to rake the ashes together.

'I will not have a fire, Rhody!' cried the old man. 'It is too warm; the winter is not yet.'

'It is biting cold,' Rhoda answered, 'and damp.'

'I cannot afford——'

'It is dangerous,' said Rhoda, 'to sleep in the cold, for an old man like you: you might never wake again.'

'Oh, no, no! Then light the fire, Rhody—just a little—not all those logs. And yet—I don't know; now that Paul has taken all that money away from me, I can't afford it; firing costs much, very much.'

Rhoda did not answer till she had kindled a flame, strengthened it with the bellows, and fed it with many logs; then when a leaping blaze made the whole dull room warm

and bright, she came and stood by the old man's side.

‘The little money that you gave to Paul,’ she said, ‘belonged to me of right. My mother left her books to me ; you sold them ; the money they fetched is mine.’

‘Her illness,’ the old man broke in—‘her long illness——’

‘She served you well when she was in health,’ said Rhoda, ‘as well as I have served you, and I know that I have earned all you have ever given me. You have wealth enough, I know, to have lived in the position in which you were born ; but yet, because my father left us penniless, my mother and I submitted to live according to your will, and we earned what you chose to give us. My mother's books were hers to leave to me ; I hold the price of them rightly, and it is not much.’

‘It is pounds,’ said Boniface—‘pounds and pounds.’

‘Forty-three pounds,’ said Rhoda. She

bent down to the old man so that she could see his face. 'Paul has given it all to me,' she said, 'and I will give it back to you shilling by shilling, if you will have a fire here all day till the spring—a shilling for every fire.'

The old man's eyes grew brighter.

'All day, Rhody? it burns a lot all day.'

'The wood belongs to you; it costs nothing, and it is there, cut and piled up, ready for burning.'

'Have you brought a shilling for to-day, Rhody?'

'The day is more than half over; but I will begin to-day.' Rhoda took a shilling from her pocket. 'The fire must be big,' she said.

The old man took the coin eagerly, and held it tightly clasped in his left hand. Rhoda went over to the hearth, and put on another log; old Wichelow writhed in his seat as he watched her, but he kept his lips tightly pressed together, and said nothing.

By-and-by Rhoda got up from the hearth and walked across the floor to the curtained doorway.

‘Where are you going?’ said old Wichelow from his settle.

The girl did not answer, but drew aside the curtain, and went into the room that had been her own. It was very bare now; the rugs had been taken from the floor, and the books, with the shelves that held them, from the walls; only the old piano remained, and one chair standing lonely before it. Rhoda stood just within the doorway, and looked into the desolate room; the dusk was thickening and half hid its emptiness, but a chill loneliness filled it from floor to ceiling; rain had begun to fall, and beat gently against the window with a soft, pattering sound. She did not stand still long; she had come with a definite purpose; and soon she moved over to the piano and felt along the top of it with her hand. Her hymn-book, the one from

which she had chosen most of the hymns she sang with the labourers, had been left behind at Heather Den when her other possessions had been taken down to the Hall ; it should still be lying in its usual place, and she had come over now to find it. She passed her hand gently along, and found what she sought, and then she turned to go back to the door. But as she turned, her foot came in contact with some hard substance that rolled away as she touched it ; she stooped down, and, feeling on the floor, found presently something thin and long, which she took back with her into the room. The blaze of firelight let her see that it was a pencil-case, and she knew at once to whom it belonged, for she had seen Anthony Dexter use it.

‘Grandfather,’ she said, ‘where does Mr. Dexter live? Do you remember?’

‘You’ve done with Mr. Dexter now,’ answered old Wichelow sourly.

‘I have found something belonging to

him,' Rhoda said. 'I suppose I should send it to him.'

'What is it? Is it of any value?'

'I don't know.' Rhoda held out her hand. 'It is this.'

'It is silver,' said the old man, taking the pencil-case, and bending forward towards the light of the fire. 'It is worth money; he ought to pay a reward for it.'

'Give it back to me,' said Rhoda quickly.

She almost snatched the pencil-case from her grandfather's grasp, and put it into her pocket; and in the same moment came a sharp knocking at the outer door.

Old Wichelow started; Rhoda crossed the room to go out into the passage.

'Who is it?' cried the old man. 'Don't open, Rhody, till you have looked out and seen who is there.'

'It is Paul,' Rhoda answered; 'I saw him pass the window.'

She went on along the stone flags and

unbarred and unbolted the door; it took her a minute or two to do, for the bolts were stiff, and the bar a heavy one. Paul entered with the rain dripping from his hat and lying in close moisture on his coat.

‘You are wet,’ said Rhoda as her hand brushed his sleeve.

‘It is raining heavily,’ he answered.

‘Why did you come?’

‘For that reason; because you would have been soaked through before you got half-way home.’

They entered the room, and Rhoda saw that he carried her thick cloak across his arm.

‘Thank you, Paul,’ she said.

He looked at her with a smile—the smile of possession.

‘Come and dry yourself at the fire,’ said old Wichelow. ‘It is a fine fire.’

‘No, we are going home now,’ Paul answered.

He put the cloak round Rhoda's shoulders as she stood in front of the hearth. She turned to the old man.

'Good-night, grandfather,' she said.

'Good-night. Good-night, Paul.'

Paul nodded from the other side of the fireplace.

'Good-night. Come, Rhoda.'

'Rhody! One minute,' the old man called as the girl passed through the doorway.

'Go on, Paul,' she said, and turned and came back to the settle.

'Stoop down—close,' said old Wichelow. 'Shall you be back to-morrow?'

'Hardly.'

'And the shilling? I cannot have a fire if you do not bring the shillings.'

'I will bring them, a shilling for every fire, when I come again. Sally will tell me if you have kept your promise.'

Rhoda walked hastily across the room and out into the passage; the outer door was

open, and Paul's head and shoulders were outlined against the rainy sky, the lower part of his figure indistinguishable against the dark background of the heath.

‘What a dreary evening!’ Rhoda cried.

‘Would you rather be staying safely here instead of coming home with me?’

Paul turned back from the door as he spoke; the fading, uncertain light came in and fell upon Rhoda's face. She looked up quickly.

‘Safely?’ she said. ‘Safety lies with you.’ Her face took on its softest look. ‘Ah, Paul!’ she said, ‘surely you know I am glad to go with you.’

She pulled the hood of her cloak over her head, and stepped out on to the doorstep. Paul followed her, and together they went forth, two dark, muffled figures, struggling through the wind and the rain.

CHAPTER II.

Bring home the bride again ;
Bring home the triumph of our victory.

SPENSER.

IN the woods the moisture was already beginning to drip from the bare branches, as the impatient wind tossed them up and down. Paul went first along the narrow path between the trees, and Rhoda followed him. Suddenly he stumbled, drew up short and almost fell ; a fallen bough lay in the way, and in the dim clouded light he had not seen it till he touched it with his foot.

‘ What is it, Paul ? ’ Rhoda asked, a startled tone in her voice.

‘ That branch,’ Paul answered, ‘ that I have

told your grandfather about so often, it has come down at last.'

The two figures stood for a minute side by side before stepping over the bough ; it lay in an angle of the path, which at this point took a sharp turn to the left. It was along this path that Rhoda had come on the evening on which Anthony Dexter had left Heather Den ; it was on the spot on which she now stood that, with a passing, desperate courage, she had gained the strength to cast him out of her life. The scene came back to her now ; the impression of it was so strong that it mingled with and dimmed the consciousness of her actual present state. This man standing beside her, was it Anthony or Paul ? She held her breath ; something of the horror and the sweetness of those moments of indecision took life again ; something of the positive physical sense of giddiness and confusion produced by a great temptation set her brain awlirl. Then Paul moved ; and she let her breath come forth

with a rush, and put out her hand and touched his arm.

‘Paul,’ she said quickly. There was almost a question in her tone.

‘There is no danger now,’ he said.

She knew that he spoke of the fallen bough, yet his words seemed an answer to her thoughts.

‘No, the danger is over,’ she answered.

Paul raised her in his arms, and lifted her over the branch.

‘Walk beside me now,’ he said ; ‘the path grows wider here.’

Rhoda walked on by his side ; and as she went, the sense of confidence which his presence always gave her, the consciousness of a strength of will and purpose greater and more consistent than her own, quieted the sudden emotion that had risen up within her, and soothed her into calmness.

It was dark when Paul and Rhoda reached Fanelands Hall. The wind was more sullen and less boisterous in the low-lying, sheltered

land about the house than on the heath and the high ground about Heather Den ; the rain fell with less of driving force. The husband and wife went through the garden round to the side door, and entered the narrow passage leading to the hall. The hall was dimly lighted ; only one lamp on a table near the fireplace sent forth beams that did not reach to either end. But the firelight helped it, and in the glow made by the burning logs Rhoda stood and shook the rain from her cloak. Her face was aglow with the wind ; little drops of moisture shone on the ruffled hair about her brow ; her eyes were both soft and bright. The hood was still on her head, making a dark, soft frame for her brilliant face. She shook her head to loosen it, and looking up, met Paul's eyes.

‘ What do I look like ? ’ she asked, laughing.

He answered her :

‘ Like Paul Garnet's wife.’

The hood fell back from her head ; she unfastened the cloak, and let it slip off on to the floor ; she came close to her husband, and stood before him, looking up into his face.

‘ Paul,’ she said, ‘ I was meant to be your wife, and you were meant for my husband. I love you : I could never love any man but you.’

Paul looked at her strangely.

‘ You could,’ he said, ‘ but you never shall.’

‘ What do you mean ?’ she asked.

‘ If I had been quite sure of you,’ he answered, ‘ I should never have loved you so deeply—nor so long. I sometimes wonder how you found it possible so to fulfil my ideal of what a woman ought to be.’

‘ I do not understand,’ she said.

‘ You know the ordinary heroine of the ordinary man ?’ he asked.

She shook her head slightly.

‘ Tell me.’

‘The ordinary heroine is faithful,’ Paul said. ‘She loves one man, once and for ever, and whether he is near or far, alive or dead. You are not faithful.’

‘Am I not?’

She spoke gravely, as though she accepted his verdict, yet with a touch of pleading in her face, as though she deprecated its positive assertion.

‘The ordinary heroine is submissive,’ Paul went on.

‘That I am,’ she broke in quickly.

‘Is submissive,’ Paul continued, ‘because it is natural to her and her duty—being a woman. You are not made so.’

‘How am I made?’ Rhoda asked, with a dawning smile.

‘The ordinary heroine of the ordinary man,’ Paul said without answering her question, ‘is never tempted from the side of the man—the ordinary man—to whom she has given her allegiance, is never ruffled by

passions that clash with duty, has no wild impulses, no capacity for evil, is a good woman, conveniently calm, and coldly pure.'

'And I?' Rhoda said after a moment's silence.

'You are not faithful; you are not submissive; you are not good with the unfailing goodness that knows no temptation to sin. If you had been, I should have loved you, inevitably, for your beauty—though in that case your beauty would never have had the distinction it carries now; but it would have passed, the love, and quickly. But, as you are, you are a woman that is never won. You submit to me now, because you feel that I am stronger than you; but if I became less strong, would you hold to me? Not you. You love me now, or almost love me, and you will continue to love me, and to lead a life free from reproach or blame. But if you were thrown into the midst of tempta-

tion, and if I were not by, could I be sure you would come forth unscathed ?'

'Could you be sure of anybody?' she whispered.

'Yes, for temptation is relative ; there are some people for whom it hardly exists. But you are not one of them, and it is just for that that I love you. I never could be quite sure what you would do ; there would be always something to control and conquer in you. You are not most men's ideal, dear heart, but you are mine ; and I will keep you safe in the place where you are set.'

'I know,' she said, 'I know you will.'

All the laughing mirth was gone from her face now ; its usual inscrutable expression covered it again, mingled with a touch of meditative sadness. She turned away from her husband, and went slowly out of the hall and up the staircase. Passing along the corridor above, she could see through the little inside windows, into the hall below.

Paul, standing by the fireplace, was just beneath her, and so was hidden from her view ; but the lamplight, and the leaping, varying light of the fire, fell upon the large organ, mute and closed. Its pipes rose up high, to the level of her gaze : she looked across at them with a curious feeling in her heart : they were to her like live things, prisoned in a silence that was allied with death.

But she looked at them only for a very little while ; very soon she passed on to the end of the corridor and entered her room. It was large and square, with one window looking out to the front and another to the side of the house. Just now it was dark, and the two windows showed spaces of heavy, fleeting clouds. Rhoda found matches and lighted a candle. She put it on the dressing-table, and stood before the mirror, looking at the reflection of her face, illumined by the flickering upward light.

‘ Paul is right,’ she said to herself : ‘ I am weak. But he is strong, as he said, and the grace of God—surely it is strong ; I shall be safe. And, besides, it is all over.’

She turned away from the mirror and crossed the room ; she put her hand into her pocket to find the key of the locked drawer in which she kept the money that Paul had induced her grandfather to give up to her. She found the key, and something else with it—the pencil-case belonging to Anthony Dexter. She had forgotten that it was there. When she saw it she let it fall upon the floor, and stood a few paces away from it, looking at it with a kind of fear.

‘ I ought to send it to him,’ she thought. ‘ Yet how ? And I have forgotten the name of the street he lives in.’

She seemed to hear a sound far off in the house, a footstep on the stairs. She went forward quickly and picked up the pencil-case ; then, unlocking a drawer in the ward-

robe, she laid it far back out of sight, behind the little heap of gold that Paul had given her. The sound on the staircase died away again ; nobody came near the room. Rhoda went over to one of the windows, still uncurtained, and stood looking out at the dark, gloomy sky.

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